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FACULTY PERCEPTIONS OF THE PURPOSE AND VALUE OF GENERAL EDUCATION:  
A COMPARISON BETWEEN THE LIBERAL ARTS AND HEALTH PROFESSIONS

By

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B.S., Canisius College, 1989

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FACULTY PERCEPTIONS OF THE PURPOSE AND VALUE OF GENERAL EDUCATION:  
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Abstract

This study examined the perceptions of the purpose and value of the general education curriculum in those undergraduate faculty members who teach in the liberal arts and the health professions at the University of New England. Perceptions were evaluated within each college and then compared between each College. A mixed-methods approach was utilized with concurrent implementation of qualitative and quantitative strands. Data were gathered from the Faculty Survey on General Education which was completed by fifty-six (29.3%) of the undergraduate faculty members. In addition, twelve faculty members were randomly selected to participate in open-ended interviews. Descriptive statistics and independent t-tests were used to examine and compare the responses of faculty members from both colleges. A thematic analysis was conducted on the faculty-respondents' interviews. Results indicated that liberal arts faculty-respondents perceived that the purpose of general education is to provide breadth of knowledge and has value in its ability to prepare students for their role as citizens. Faculty-respondents from the health professions perceived that the purpose of general education is to provide intellectual and practical skills and has value in its ability to prepare students for their role as citizens. Respondents from both colleges perceived that general education serves a value of public good, liberal arts through democratic equality and health professions through social efficiency.

University of New England

Doctor of Education  
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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

A liberal arts education, as defined by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) is “an approach to college learning that empowers individuals and prepares them to deal with complexity, diversity, and change” (AAC&U, 2011, p. 3). General education is the aspect of a liberal arts education that all undergraduate students are typically required to complete. Its primary purpose is to “provide coherence and unity in an otherwise specialized undergraduate experience” (Board, n.d.). The goals of general education are not always well defined to the university community and this may lead to the general education curriculum being viewed as an obstacle more than a valued part of the higher education experience (Harmes & Miller, 2007; Smith and Bender, 2008; Arun & Roska, 2011). Due to global initiatives and continuous shifts in the economy, the ideals of general education may be more important than ever, though, arguably, more misunderstood than ever before (Humphreys, 2014).

Throughout the past decade, there has been a consistent rise in the number of students being awarded a baccalaureate degree from a health professions program. The “*Condition of Education*” report (2014) provided by the National Center for Education Statistics revealed that health professions-related fields gained the largest percentage increase (124%) between 2001-02 and 2011-12 compared to other bachelor’s degrees awarded. With current pressures of increased prescriptive credits designated by professional accreditation agencies of specific health professions’ programs (Commission of Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs, 2007), rising tuition costs, and the increased number of students competing for professional

graduate programs, educators, students, and parents alike are conflicted over the continued relevancy and value of general education (Mincer, 2011; Newton, 2000; Brint, Riddle, Turk-Bicakci, & Levy, 2005). Due to these trends, institutions find themselves in a familiar situation of clarifying and/or redefining the aim of higher education; to provide a broad education which enables discovery and an investigation of life or to provide specific discipline-based knowledge to successfully navigate a career (Humphreys, 2014, Smith & Bender, 2008; Newman, 1801-1890).

Many argue that liberal arts are not the best preparation for gaining employment (Humphreys, 2014). In addition, the prescriptive standards associated with accreditation can have a significant impact on general education requirements. However, there is emerging support for maintaining general education requirements within health profession programs (Carey, 2014; AAC&U, 2007; Hart Research Associate, 2013; Shinn, 2012). Stakeholders, primarily employers, stress the importance of gaining the ability to critically think, conduct complex reasoning, communicate effectively, and demonstrate intercultural competence prior to entering a professional career (Hart Research Associate, 2013). The former are amongst the Liberal Education and America's Promise (L.E.A.P) "essential learning outcomes": (a) human cultures and the physical and natural world, (b) intellectual and practical skills, (c) personal and social responsibility, and (d) integrative and applied learning (AAC&U, 2007). Recent reports have shown that colleges and universities are producing students who are too limited in these knowledge and skill sets to be successful in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century workplace (AAC&U, 2007; American Management Association, 2010; Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills, 2008; and Hart Research Associate, 2013). As the Medical College Admission Test (MCAT, 2015 version) and health professions' professional associations (e.g. American Association of Colleges of Nursing)

begin to recognize the importance of the learning outcomes of liberal education, it is critical to focus on implementing and enhancing the value of an intentionally integrative curriculum for those pursuing undergraduate degrees in the health professions (Riegelman, 2012). Bednar (as cited in Christensen, 2011, p. 165) noted:

Our success as an institution will be predicted by, in large measure, how well we facilitate the integration of curriculum and pedagogy across traditional boundaries. If we focus exclusively on departmental development and fail to achieve this overarching objective of effective integration, then we have bungled one of the greatest educational opportunities [of our time].

In these terms, if institutions can enhance integration and communication of the general education program's purpose and value, through pedagogy, course design, faculty advising, and curriculum design, students may be more open to utilizing and appreciating the connections between their professional discipline and a liberal arts education (Humphreys, 2014).

### **Statement of Problem**

Health professions programs are highly marketable investments which typically allow institutions to remain competitive within the changing global market. Previous literature has suggested that the emergence of health professions programs may threaten traditional liberal arts-focused general education and lend to the perceived tension between the representing faculties (Albano, 2007; Menand, 2008; Morrel & Zimmerman, 2008; and Taylor, 2010). This tension often leads to an unclear and perhaps conflicting purposes of general education (Humphreys, 2014; Sears, 1994; and Sellers, 1989).

Much of the previous work tends to focus on (a) perceptions of faculty in the health professions towards liberal education, (b) perceptions of faculty in the liberal arts towards

professional education, and (c) the perceived conflict between the goals of liberal and professional education. Future studies should attempt to understand and bridge the gap between liberal and professional education to design a cohesive, collaborative, strengthened, and valued general education curriculum (Fenstermacher as cited in Mincer, 2011; Sullivan & Rosin, 2008). Therefore, instead of a barrier, the general education curriculum may become a respected extension of the specialized discipline. In addition, there is limited research attempting to understand how the competing narratives, which are commonly used to define the purpose of general education, may influence the value faculty members place on the general education curriculum.

The University of New England is amongst the approximate 90% of higher education institutions currently in stages of general education curriculum reform (Hart Research Associate, 2013). The goal of this current research was to gain insight into how faculty members from the College of Arts and Sciences and the Westbrook College of Health Professions at the University of New England perceive the purpose and value of the general education curriculum. This serves as a practical first-step towards understanding the culture of the institution thus providing a foundation to develop a sense of cohesion between the Colleges, a common purpose, potential integration, and enhanced value of the general education curriculum.

The purpose of this research was to describe and compare the perceptions of College of Arts and Sciences and Westbrook College of Health Professions faculty members at the University of New England regarding the purpose and value of the general education curriculum.

Specifically, this study addressed the following research questions:

1. How do faculty members who teach in the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of New England perceive the purpose and value of the general education curriculum?

2. How do faculty members who teach in the Westbrook College of Health Professions and the University of New England perceive the purpose and value of the general education curriculum?
3. Are there differences in the perceptions of the purpose and value of the general education curriculum between faculty members who teach in the College of Arts and Sciences and the Westbrook College of Health Professions at the University of New England?

### **Significance of Study**

The American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) (2007) recognizes that higher education institutions must prepare students for an increasingly challenging environment. According to employers, graduates are not able to assert effective communication, think critically, or understand the importance of multiple perspectives (Shinn, 2012). Faculty members' perceptions of the purpose and value of the general education curriculum have introduced areas of intersection between the College of Arts and Sciences and the Westbrook College of Health Professions to facilitate well-informed curriculum reform. Overall, it is increasingly important to build a bridge that connects a broad set of disciplines for undergraduate students, not only for potential enhancement of essential learning outcomes, but to create an improved environment for student learning. The lingering gap between perceived goals of general education and professional programs must be reconciled to provide an effective road map to responsible, well-rounded citizenry and effective service as a health care professional in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This research integrates three theoretical frameworks that inform the study: (a) public good versus private good (Labaree, 1997), (b) intersectionality (Mincer, 2011; Purdie-Vaughns

& Eibach, 2008), and (c) practical reason-based education (Sullivan & Rosin, 2008). Each framework addresses the shaping of the purpose of general education and how these purposes speak to the value of general education.

**Public good versus private good.** Labaree's (1997) work explored three educational goals: (a) democratic equality, (b) social efficiency; and (c) social mobility. The goal of democratic equality is education for the purist form of public good; "a democratic society cannot persist unless it prepares all of its young with equal care to take on the full responsibilities of citizenship in a competent manner" (Labaree, 1997, p. 42). Education based on democratic equality will, therefore, serve to prepare students to usefully contribute to society. Within an institution, the goal of democratic equality involves citizenship training, equal treatment, and equal access. Citizenship training was a concept developed to neutralize the effects of capitalism on society by instilling the framework of citizenship in educational systems (Kaestle, 1983). Labaree (1997) suggested that institutions can address citizenship through a strong commitment to liberal education as opposed to specialized training; "all members of a free society need familiarity with the full range of that society's culture [to participate effectively]" (p.44). Equal treatment was partnered with citizenship as a result of increased capitalism and immigration within the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. It was thought that educational systems could be the bridge of various cultures, facilitating a merged common culture and enabling all to share in the development and maintenance of a community (Katznelson & Weir, 1985). General education, therefore, is perhaps a catalyst for equal treatment as it provides a common experience and common knowledge that will contribute to the students' role as a citizen. Lastly, equal access contributes to the goal of democratic equality.



Sharing the public good platform with democratic equality is the goal of social efficiency; “our economic well-being depends on our ability to prepare the young to carry out useful economic roles with competence.” (Labaree, 1997, pg. 42). Education for social efficiency is designed to prepare a productive workforce, thus creating a focus on the economic needs of the society. This educational goal has influenced the trend towards vocationalism and compartmentalization over a liberal-arts focused, uniform general education curriculum. Giddens (1984) suggested that social efficiency shifts the goal of an institution away from a broad knowledge for the sake of knowing concept to a practical skills-based education greatly dictated by the needs of the marketplace. Although for public good, unlike the common broad purpose of democratic equality, the goal of social efficiency is to provide a narrow, practical skills-based education to produce graduates who are prepared to enter the workforce. Public good is accomplished, therefore by the contribution these new workers make to the economic needs of society. To this end, the goal is to satiate the workforce, regardless of who the employee is, as long as they are knowledgeable. For social efficiency to be effective, the curriculum must be comprehensive to address this public good goal (Labaree, 1997).

Lastly, the educational goal of social mobility states that education should “provide individual students with a competitive advantage in the struggle for desirable social positions,” (Labaree, 1997, pg. 42) as opposed to the socioeconomic needs of society. Therefore, education serves a private good leading to an enhanced individual opportunity; credentialing to gain a personal advantage in the workforce becomes the ultimate goal as opposed to knowledge. The goal of social mobility requires a curriculum which adheres to a consumer model which is strongly dictated by each student’s individual aspirations; highly self-selective and varied

between students. Boudon suggested that social mobility is not based on equal opportunities, rather it is based on receiving better opportunities than others (as cited in Labaree, 1997).

As an institution works towards general education curriculum reform, its culture and overall mission should be examined. The goals of democratic equality, social efficiency, and social mobility often fluctuate in priority and are often in effect concurrently within the same institution. An attempt to intersect all three goals can actually hinder the value and effectiveness of each as one may weaken the other(s) (Labaree, 1997). All three of these educational goals and the potential cross-purposing of these goals inform this study as they influence the ability to provide a clear and well defined purpose and value of the general education curriculum, thus potentially setting the tone of conflict between general and professional education.

**Intersectionality.** The social theory of intersectionality is based upon the interaction of two social locations and how they influence experiences and outcomes (Crenshaw, 1989). Intersectional invisibility suggests that cross-purposes can reduce one purpose and value and render it “invisible” (Purdie-Vaughn & Eibach, 2008). Labaree (1997) provided an example by suggesting that both goals for public good, democratic equality and social efficiency are rather destabilized by the goal of private good. It is difficult for all of these educational goals to co-exist without weakening the others. Mincer (2011) suggested that intersectionality may minimize the obstacles between the cross-purposes of liberal education and professional education; “this body of scholarship (intersectionality) connects ideas across disciplines and interlaces constructs that have customarily been treated as separate and distinct” (Dill, McLaughlin, & Nieves, 2006, p. 634). Mincer (2011) investigated the concept of intersectionality when he surveyed faculty members representing liberal education and health professional education. Results revealed that faculty members from both educational programs

agreed that liberal education and health professional education are important and both agreed on the goals of higher education. However, they both reported a lack of understanding of each other, thus leading to tension between the two. The primary barrier to overcome within the intersection of these programs was the lack of communication between the faculty members representing each program. Mincer suggested that improved communication may enable both liberal and professional education programs to work together to remain visible and viable; one cannot meet its full potential without the other. In the current research, identifying areas of intersectionality between a liberal arts-focused general education (democratic equality) and a skill-based, utilitarian-focused general education (social efficiency and/or social mobility) is critical for the development of a cohesive, collaborative, and valued general education curriculum.

**Practical reason-based education.** Sullivan and Rosin (2008) proposed that usefulness is a point of intersection between a liberal education and professional-based education. The varied purposes of the general education curriculum are rooted in several educational philosophies: (a) Aristotle adhered to an education that created a moral elite citizen, (b) John Locke proposed that education should contribute to a future profession, (c) John Henry Newman recommended that all education, liberal and practical, can be useful to the student becoming a good member of society. The latter serves as a foundation for in practical reason-based education. Within the professional fields, knowledge is paired with skillful performance. However, responsible application of this knowledge and skill cannot occur without critical thinking and informed judgment. On the other hand, liberal education cultivates critical thinking and citizenship, though often ignoring the practical engagement of these outcomes. Work by Sisola (2000) exemplified the potential of practical-based education to bridge both forms of education when she investigated the importance

of moral reasoning to the development of physical therapy students. Results showed that moral reasoning had a significant predictive relationship with clinical performance. Thus, Sisola concluded that a strong liberal education enables physical therapists to acquire moral reasoning skills that will potentially facilitate the resolution of ethical conflicts in their professional practice. Thus, practical reason-based education strives to bridge the strengths and weaknesses of both; professional education can be complemented by applying the moral outcomes of liberal education (Nichols, 2004).

### **Assumptions**

This study embraced two underlying assumptions. The first assumption was that undergraduate health professions students at UNE are required to complete general education requirements grounded in the liberal arts. The second assumption was that the faculty members from both the College of Arts and Sciences and the Westbrook College of Health Professions addressed their perceptions concerning the purpose and value of the general education curriculum with honesty. To help with this assumption, participants will be made aware of the confidentiality standards within the informed consent.

### **Limitations**

The following are limitations of this study:

1. The population was a sample of convenience. The results the study cannot be generalized to larger populations.
2. This was a cross-sectional study, therefore the results represent perceptions for only the current time period and could not evaluate change in perceptions over time.

3. The researcher is a current faculty member within the Westbrook College of Health Professions. Care was taken to eliminate bias through the use of a de-identified survey and by elimination of any conscious feedback to the responses of those interviewed.

### **Delimitations**

The purpose of this study was to describe and compare the perceptions of College of Arts and Sciences and Westbrook College of Health Professions faculty members regarding the purpose and value of the general education curriculum at the University of New England. The scope of this study was limited as follows:

1. The sample size was limited to undergraduate faculty members teaching in the College of Arts and Sciences and the Westbrook College of Health Professions at the University of New England, thus the study did not examine graduate faculty members or additional institutions.
2. Although other variables such as status of employment, specialization area, and faculty members own personal higher education experience may have an influence on perceptions of the general education curriculum, they were not examined in this study.

### **Definitions of Terms**

**Liberal education:** An education that provides knowledge and intellectual skills necessary for maintaining the needs of a society. It strives for an intrinsic value, i.e. knowledge for the sake of knowing. Liberal education will provide broad, well-rounded insight into the world as well as provide an in-depth study in a specific interest. Liberal education contributes to a liberal arts-focused general education.

**Liberal arts:** Specific disciplines within liberal education; natural sciences, humanities, art, social sciences, and mathematics.

**General education:** A body of knowledge derived primarily from liberal education that is required of all undergraduate students. Though general education is a critical component of liberal education, it does not involve depth within one discipline. General education encompasses the arts, sciences, humanities, and civil responsibility and provides breadth outside of the major discipline. General education is often referred to as “core curriculum”.

**Professional education:** An education that provides knowledge, practical, and intellectual skills necessary to enter into a specific profession. Health professional education is a form of professional education, preparing students for graduate programs and careers in the health professions, e.g., exercise science, athletic training, dental hygiene, nursing, physical therapy, occupational therapy, physician assistant, etc.

**Human cultures and the physical and natural world:** An outcome of liberal education and/or a liberal arts-focused general education. This is referred to as study in the sciences, histories, social sciences, humanities, languages, arts, and mathematics.

**Intellectual and practical skills:** Outcomes of liberal education and/or a liberal-arts-focused general education. This is referred to as inquiry and analysis, critical and creative thinking, written and verbal communication, quantitative reasoning, information literacy, teamwork, and problem solving.

**Personal and social responsibility:** Outcomes of liberal education and/or a liberal arts-focused general education. This is referred to as civic knowledge and engagement,

intercultural knowledge and competence, ethical reasoning and action, and foundations and skills for lifelong learning.

**Integrative and applied learning:** A blending of general education with specialization.

This is referred to as the application of knowledge, skills, and responsibilities to contribute to society and/or a profession.

### **Design of Study**

The population for this study included undergraduate faculty members from the College of Arts and Sciences and the Westbrook College of Health Professions at the University of New England. Those who chose to participate in the study completed a web-based Likert-type survey and some were then randomly selected to be interviewed by the researcher. The survey was adapted from several perception-based general education studies (Rosario, 2012; Johnson-Garcia, 2010; Mincer, 2011; Sears, 1994). Likert-type questions were designed to address faculty perceptions towards the purpose and value of the general education curriculum. Six primary open-ended questions were developed to answer the research questions. Each primary question had additional sub-questions to prompt additional information. The literature review (Chapter 2) helped guide the development of the interview questions which focused on both, the purpose and value of general education. This combined methodology was used to explore: (a) CAS faculty-respondents' perceptions towards the purpose and value of the general education curriculum, (b) WCHP faculty-respondents' perceptions towards the purpose and value of the general education curriculum, and (c) the differences in perceptions between CAS and WCHP faculty respondents.

## **Plan of Presentation**

This dissertation was organized into five chapters: Chapter 1: Introduction, Chapter 2: Literature Review, Chapter 3: Methodology, Chapter 4: Analysis of Data, and Chapter 5: Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations. Chapter 1 provides an introduction to the study of faculty members' perceptions of the purpose and value of the general education curriculum. Chapter 2 provides a comprehensive review of literature as it related to the research questions. Chapter 3 describes the methodology of the study to include its design, study population, study instruments, and procedures for data collection and analysis. In Chapter 4 the data derived from the research instruments are presented. Chapter 5 provides a summary of findings and presented conclusions and recommendations.

## **Chapter Summary**

The tension between liberal and professional education is often developed as educators struggle to answer the question, "what knowledge is of most worth?" (Dressel, 1979). As student debt is on the rise and graduates are having difficulty attaining jobs, students and parents, alike may start to question the relevancy of the general education curriculum and place more worth on professional programs (Carey, 2014). At the same time, employers have reported that a potential candidate's ability to think critically, communicate effectively, and solve complex problems is more important than their undergraduate major (AAC&U, 2007). This study set out to understand this ongoing conflict in hopes of identifying an intersection between liberal education and professional education that may quiet this debate. Enabling students to appreciate the value of general education versus viewing these requirements as obstacles to moving forward in their discipline is critical to bridging the gap between the two Colleges. Students need to come to understand that their education is not limited to only professional outcomes; the



continuance of a democratic society and social efficiency depend upon their ability to become informed and engaged citizens (Humphreys, 2014). Educational leaders must contribute to this understanding by enhancing the interrelation of the general education curriculum and students' major of choice (Boyer, 1987). This study investigated the perceptions of faculty-respondents from the College of Arts and Sciences and the Westbrook College of Health Professions towards the purpose and value of the general education curriculum.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter provides a comprehensive review of several topics that are relevant to understanding the significance and scope of this study. This review will provide an overview of general education and its definition, purpose and goals, and tensions. A historical perspective of general education will be reviewed, both in general terms and as it has evolved at the University of New England. Through this review of past and recent research, one comes to recognize that there remains an unsettled question concerning the role the general education curriculum should play in higher education institutions, notably in those that share mission statements with health professions programs.

Similar to the University of New England, many institutions are undergoing general education reform so to adapt to the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. There is a vast amount of research concerning the perceptions of students and their future workplaces have concerning the general education curriculum, however, there is limited research which examines faculty perceptions of the purpose and value of general education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Word (2007) reported that general education reform is typically based on praxis and policy but suggests that scholarship is often ignored in the process. Referring to previous scholarship and conducting new research to gain a better understanding of general education is critical to its effectiveness (Word, 2007). The current study contributes to the body of general education scholarship. The perceptions of faculty members often reflect the culture of an institution and can promote the development of an effective and coherent general education curriculum across the liberal arts and health professions colleges within an institution (American Association of Colleges and Universities, 2007; Staley & Trinkle, 2011; Morrel & Zimmerman, 2008; Domholdt, 2007, Word, 2011).

This review of literature will examine relevant research as it relates to liberal arts and health professions faculty members' perceptions of the purpose and value of general education. Chapter two is structured into four primary areas: 1) defining general education; 2) historical perspective on general education in the United States and at the University of New England; 3) the needs of general education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century; and 4) previous research focused on faculty members' perceptions of general education.

### **Defining General Education**

Through the spectrum of available literature regarding general education, there are several ways to define its components, purpose, and goals. This variation may be related to the notion that the culture of each institution and societal needs typically dictate the design of general education (Cohen & Grawer, 1989). The American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) defines general education as “part of the liberal education curriculum that is shared by all students. It provides broad exposure to multiple disciplines and forms a basis for developing important intellectual, civic, and practical capacities” (AAC&U, 2015). Work by Smith investigated academic chief officers' perceptions of the purpose of general education, to find that they perceive that general education should: (a) provide insight into western heritage, (b) broaden the scope of student learning outside of the major, (c) develop skills such as effective communication and critical thinking, (d) develop lifelong learning skills, and (e) provide social awareness (as cited in Mendez, 2006). Though the general education curriculum is a critical component of liberal education, it does not involve depth within a specific discipline. General education provides breadth and serves as a figurative extension of liberal education by providing an interdisciplinary approach which focuses on integration and a comprehensive understanding (Mincer, 2011). However, general education may serve to supplement specialized career-based

education by familiarizing students with a variety of subject matter and introducing varied approaches to inquiry and thought (Ratcliff, Johnson, La Nasa, & Graff, 2001). Although general education can provide knowledge with practical application, this is not its primary focus, rather the priority is developing intellect that will contribute to students' role as responsible citizens within society (Sellers, 1989; Smith & Bender, 2008).

Despite the AAC&U's seemingly clear and precise definition of general education, there is a certain level of ambiguity as institutions often question *what* general education should entail and *how* to meet it defining parameters (Mendez, 2006). On one hand, general education is designed to provide knowledge that every well-educated college student should know, but as Zai III (2015) suggested, it is still widely variable between colleges and universities. Thus, it would appear that general education is grounded within the context of an institution's culture (Johnson-Garcia, 2010). The change in emphasis on general education typically occurs due to rapid development in areas of knowledge, fluctuating student enrollment and interests, faculty members' beliefs and values, and unpredictability within the marketplace and global economy (Stevens, 2001; Mincer, 2011; Mendez, 2006; Albano, 2007; and Smith & Bender, 2008; Word, 2012). A lack of clarity or common purpose of general education often leaves faculty and students perceiving it as a barrier standing in the way of the more intriguing, discipline-centered courses (Wehlburg, 2010; Newton, 2002).

### **Historical Perspective**

The evolution of general education can be linked to a continuous shifting emphasis on traditional liberal arts education and specialization. Sears (1994) suggested that general education is a "cultural analogy" (p. 10); its goals often emulate the values of society and the fluctuating defining parameters of higher education. The purpose of this study is to identify

faculty members' perceptions of the purpose and value of the general education curriculum at the University of New England. To understand the foundation of these perceptions it is helpful to consider the history of general education, its shifts in time, and its evolution at the University of New England.

**17th Century.** Early institutions, such as Harvard University (established in 1636), William and Mary (established in 1693), and Yale (established in 1701), designed their curriculum based on a classical liberal arts model derived from Ancient Greek education (Debrew, 2008). Aristotle and Plato believed that the purpose of higher education was to create an intellectual and moral elite citizen. This education served to establish contemplation as the key to a life of happiness and leisure, not to provide practical or useful skills (Naugle, 2001). Vocational or specialized education was left to slaves who were using trade skills while the *trivium*, i.e. grammar, rhetoric, and logic and *quadrivium*, i.e. arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy were reserved for free men and the elite so they would become well-rounded citizens. These institutions had a single common curriculum, closely linking values of the society, church, and educators. There was no compartmentalization between the discipline and this common curriculum, therefore it was not considered to be a “general education” as currently defined (Boning, 2007). All students took the same prescribed courses centralized in the classics as they worked towards limited choices in vocational fields such as clergy, law, or medicine (Boyer & Levine, 1981; Wehlburg, 2010).

As Harvard University provided a template in classical liberal arts education for other early colleges to follow, John Locke was offering a different perspective. Locke introduced an educational philosophy based on “useful” education (Stone, 1998). In the *Idea of a University, Discourse VII, Section 4*, Newman notes that Locke found it “silly” that students should be

wasting money on learning language, when they should be preparing for a trade; there would be no usefulness for this education in the student's future (p. 120). Within the established curriculum of earlier colleges, Locke promoted courses such as anatomy, physics, chemistry, and geography which detracted from the classical approach. Locke conveyed the importance of education as a contributor to a future profession or trade and argues against education for the sake of creating a scholar.

**19th Century.** The dichotomy between the liberal and specialized purpose of higher education was subject to great debate throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The discourses provided by John Henry Newman presented integral insight into the argumentative dialogue of the past and present. Newman explained that liberal education is a form of specialized training. Unlike Locke, Newman contended that education should not be limited to a specific, defined measureable end; knowledge is for the sake of knowledge versus learning for the sake of earning (Stone, 1998). On the surface this appears to be two separate views but Newman also suggested that all education is indeed *useful* to man and community (Discourse VII, 4, p. 122). Thus, the utilitarian-minded professional education can be complemented by the moral and philosophical outcomes of liberal education (Nichols, 2004). This becomes more clear if classical liberal education encompassed not only cultivation of a mind, but also incorporated critical thinking and inquiry, thus creating usefulness of knowledge in the professions. In consideration of Locke's philosophy of education, Newman cautioned against being too focused on one pursuit due the risk of being only able to contribute to society in limited ways and perhaps, not learn of other potential interests. Therefore if education is to create a practical end, Newman would propose that education is useful in "training good members of society" (Discourse VII, 10, p. 134) no matter the focus of study.

Early in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, many universities were caught in a triangle of philosophical chaos (DeBrew, 2008) formed by those who tried to hold on to the ancient elitist design, those who adhered to Locke's quest of utility, and those who followed Newman's complementary approach. Thomas noted that these cross-purposes led to the use of the term "general education" (as cited in Sears, 1994, p.14). Though most students were preparing for disciplines in areas of rapidly expanding knowledge, such as law, medicine, or divinity, there was little depth offered to these disciplines within the traditional or classical curriculum model. Thus, institutions implemented a general education curriculum that would be common to all students regardless of chosen discipline. Sears (1994) suggests that general education, therefore, was born out of the limitations of liberal education or its prescribed and classical model.

As more practical alternatives were being offered in addition to the traditional curriculum, there was confusion about the once unified purpose of higher education. In 1828, faculty at Yale University addressed the disparities of purpose by prescribing a foundational curriculum based upon classical liberal education for all undergraduate students (Rudolph, 1977). The Yale Report declared that undergraduate education should provide the groundwork for specialized education which would then be completed in graduate programs (as cited in Rosario, 2012).

The pendulum of higher education continued to swing away from the limited classical liberal education in the later years of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Elective curriculums, enabling students to open themselves to more disciplines of their choice were introduced at several universities, e.g. University of Virginia, Brown University, Harvard University, and Johns Hopkins University. These elective systems were founded on the premise that the university should work to accommodate the changes taking place in society and within those for whom they serve

(Rudolph, 1977). This model was perhaps the first glimpse into the development of recent general education curriculums. Students had more freedom of choice and so did the faculty, often choosing to develop elective courses derived from their specialization. This is more apparent with the introduction of the Morrill Land-Grant Act of 1862 and its resultant rise of vocational-focused institutions and in the number of those who would have access to higher education.

***The 19<sup>th</sup> Century at the developing UNE.*** The Westbrook Seminary was established in 1831 offering liberal education to both men and women. The seminary shared many characteristics with other institutions caught in the philosophical triangle of the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The 1834-35 Westbrook Seminary catalog states that the Seminary offered “common English Studies” and “languages and higher branches of mathematics”. The 1844 catalog positioned these studies into two departments; the Classical Department providing the ancient and modern languages and the English Department which is similar to the liberal studies of today. Two practical fields were available within the English Department, navigation and surveying. The curriculum provided choices for those desiring knowledge for the sake of knowledge and those who would continue with professional studies. The remaining catalogs for the 19<sup>th</sup> Century recorded the curriculum in terms of books not courses, similar to today’s “Great Book” general education model. The Seminary was granted the ability to confer two degrees to women, “*Lady of Liberal Learning*” and “*Lady of English Learning*”. These degrees evolved into a “*Laureate of Arts*” and a “*Laureate of Science*”, respectively. In addition, a Department of Special Studies was developed for painting, drawing, and music. Interestingly in 1870, elective courses were offered and lectures for all students were added outside of a normal class structure. Again, one can see the roots of various current general education models.

**20<sup>th</sup> Century.** The move towards specialization in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century was, to



some extent, restrained in the early 1900's in an attempt to create common preparation and competencies for all students regardless of discipline. Institutions also had to provide a pathway for those who may not yet know their future career plans. As a result, there was movement away from the elective system in favor of the implementation of distribution requirements (Wehlburg, 2011; Mendez, 2006; Stevens, 2001).

Harvard University completed an important revision to its general education curriculum. The *General Education in a Free Society* or “*Red Book*”, told the story of this reform that still proves to be influential (Harvard University, 1945; Word, 2012). Here, it was proposed that general education should be “one-third” (as cited in Wehlburg, 2011, p. 6) of the undergraduate degree allowing for breadth *and* depth [within discipline]. This design is very similar to the current requirements of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC), University of New England's accrediting body. The publication of the *Red Book* brought the role of general education to the forefront of scholarship, further contributing to the incoherence between general education and specialized education (Word, 2012; Hofstader & Hardy, 1962; National Society for the Study of Education, 1952). Most of this literature, including the Harvard publication, called for a clear distinction between both approaches, one which focuses on the becoming a responsible citizen, the other addressing practical competencies specific to a profession. This confusion contributed to the ongoing debate about the overall purpose of the general education curriculum; was its purpose specifically rooted in classical liberal education or should it be adjusted to the social constructs of the current culture? (Harvard University, 1952; Weisinger, 1963; Word, 2012). Walker suggested that these ongoing tensions and the lack of a clearly defined purpose of general education led to an explosion of multiple, disarticulated general education models (as cited in Word, 2012).

To add to the ongoing dialogue, the Higher Education Act of 1965 was implemented which allowed for increased funding and accessibility to higher education. Institutions would now also have to consider education to an increased heterogeneous population versus a system once reserved for the more elite. At this time there was an increase in specialized research, a need for more diverse disciplines, and increased credentialization (Mendez, 2006; Stevens, 2001). The education goal at this time shifted towards social mobility, perhaps more than any time that came before (Labaree, 1997). Thus, the importance of general education requirements was perceived to be lessened in order to support the needs of the students within their specializations.

During the latter parts of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the Generalists [of the General Education Movement] were very concerned about the diminishing emphasis on breadth and the lessened value of general education (Bloom, 1987; Mendez, 2006). Several reports were published to call attention to this concern: (a) *Missions of the College Curriculum* (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1977) which declared general education as a “disaster area” (p.11), (b) Cheney’s (1989) *50 hours: A Core for College Students* which addressed the “fragmented state of the curriculum” (p. 1), (c) *Integrity in the College Curriculum* (Association of American Colleges, 1990) which warned against designing the curriculum based on the marketplace and expressed the need for a general education with more rigor than that defined by distribution requirements and student interest, and (d) *New Vitality in General Education* (Association of American Colleges, 1992), which reported that students were graduating with a perception of receiving an indistinct and disarticulated education in courses outside of their discipline. Generalists suggested that the university, due to overspecialization, was failing to prepare the student to contribute to the stabilization of society (Boyer & Levine, 1983). Stark &

Lattuca (1997) proposed that the primary emerging theme from these reports was that general education, despite its ongoing tensions, provides value to undergraduate education and its purpose is worth pursuing. Due to the ongoing dissatisfaction and conflict, the transitional period from the late 1990's to the present would become a time of vast general education reform (Mendez, 2006; Ratcliff, Johnson, & Gaff, 2004; White, 1995).

*The 20<sup>th</sup> Century at the developing UNE (Westbrook College).* The Westbrook Seminary became the Westbrook Seminary and Junior College in 1929 and became inclusive to only women. By 1931, it assumed the name of the Westbrook Junior College for Girls. Of significance, in 1934, the junior college received accreditation from the New England Association for Schools and Colleges (NEASC) and remains to be member today. Through the 1930's two primary curricula were offered, a liberal arts curriculum for those wishing to pursue a Bachelor's of Art degree and a science curriculum for work towards a Bachelor's of Science degree. Both curricula were very similar in course requirements. Much like nationwide trends at this time, a "General Curriculum" offered open electives so students could explore a variety of fields before choosing a specialization. Professional studies dominated the discipline choices (Secretarial Science, Pre-Commerce, Medical Secretary, and Recreational Leadership), preparing many for the workforce directly upon graduating. Art, Music, and Physical Education were also available. In essence, as described in the catalog (Catalog 1935-36), the junior college was either provided a lower division curriculum to prepare for study of a specialization in senior college, or a semi-professional curriculum which was developed for those who needed more than a high school degree but no further specialization. Administrators at the time agreed that the two year semi-professional curriculum following high school offered enough foundation for graduates to contribute to public good. At this time the only requirements for all students were English

Composition, Physical Education, Orientation, and varied number of electives in the liberal arts (Catalog 1935-36).

In 1940, there were five curriculums offered: (a) *Transfer* curriculum to prepare for senior college study in Liberal Arts or Secretarial Science, (b) *Teacher Training* curriculum, (c) *Terminal* curriculum to prepare students in trades that would gain immediate employment or homemaking, (d) *Pre-Professional* curriculum to prepare for future specialization in Occupational Therapy, Merchandising, and Nursing, and (e) *Exploratory* curriculum in Music, Art, and Journalism. It should be noted that the Pre-Professional curriculum consisted of many foundational courses commonly offered within general education requirements. Students chose these courses based on the prerequisites needed for their professional school of choice. All students were still required to take English Composition, Physical Education and a varied number of electives as dictated by curriculum of choice. Again, the only common courses amongst all students were English Composition and Physical Education, thus exemplifying the emphasis on professional preparation (Catalog 1940-41). This model continues through the 1950's with additional disciplines added under the umbrella of each curricular choice.

Much like other higher education institutions, the 1960's brought much change to curriculum. The College expanded its programs and offered several Associate in Arts degrees (Liberal Arts, General Studies) and Associate in Applied Science degrees (Retailing, Secretarial Studies, Medical Secretary, Dental Hygiene, and Nursing). It also implemented a Bachelor's of Science option in Medical Terminology. Hence, there was an increase in specialization with a focus in the health professions. However, as Harvard's *Red Book* resonated over the past 15 years, Westbrook Junior College heeded the cautions of overspecialization. It was important to the College to maintain "unity" across the disciplines. Though there were more professional

than liberal arts program, the College would continue to require all students to take English Composition (six credits) and Physical Education (four credits), and introduced six credits of The Culture of Western Man (from Humanities) to add breadth to their discipline-oriented studies. This was not yet called “General Education” as these requirements were simply prescribed within their discipline curriculum. Most majors, in addition, offered a variable amount of electives, some open and some prescribed. Because of the rigors of many programs, some did not have space for any electives. This is a common issue today, as many health professions curricula are dictated by national professional accreditation requirements.

In 1970, Westbrook Junior College became Westbrook College and started the process of becoming a four-year college. Several changes in the curriculum during the seventies continued to show the tensions in general education. First the College implemented the *Two Plus Two: Westbrook Plan* to focus on vocational studies; the ability for a student to earn a bachelor’s degree in a chosen professional field by enrolling in other institutions following their two year experience. This enabled students to earn a Bachelor of Arts or Science. Secondly, they added a four-one-four curriculum to enable one month of intensive, project-based study within a chosen specialization. Still, only the same sixteen credits from the previous decade were required for all students. Thirdly, the 1970’s brought the introduction of divisions; Division of Liberal Arts, Division of Business Education, and Division of Health Services. As noted previously, the implementation of these divisions may lend to fragmentation of the curriculum (Cheney, 1989). Next, an interdisciplinary seminar to introduce the liberal arts became a requirement for freshmen Liberal Arts majors, though open to all students. Lastly, the catalogs of this decade started using language to state the importance of finding coherence between both the liberal arts and specialized education claiming that one cannot exist without the other. The College’s

philosophy was centered upon a commitment to the liberal arts across all disciplines. However, the majors dictated how many electives within the liberal arts as student would take and the only courses required of all students, regardless of the major, were English Composition and The Culture of Western Man. To note, many programs also removed The Culture of Western Man by the end of the decade.

Through the 1980's, the language in the catalog changed from an emphasis on a career-oriented education with a foundation in the liberal arts to using more explicit language about the College's commitment to the liberal arts and its important relationship to a successful career. It was also noted that it was the College's goal to enable students to grasp the true value of the liberal arts through overt communication of its purpose and significance. Overall, each program would merge career education, liberal studies, and practical experience-a new addition to discipline curriculum. During this time, themes were introduced as the framework for liberal education: (a) The Nature of Human Existence and Society, (b) The Nature of the Contemporary World, and (c) The Search for Meaning. Specific requirements around these themes were presented for each degree offered. Those students working towards an associate's degree were asked to fulfill 25% of their requirements in the liberal arts, while those earning a bachelor's degree would fulfill 50% of their requirements in the liberal arts. At least three credits were derived from each, the humanities, math, and natural sciences or social sciences. A primary reason for these changes was to promote ease of transfer. For the health profession-focused disciplines, these requirements were often done within the major itself. To respond to the nation's acknowledgement of the importance of multiculturalism, the College also added study abroad semesters. Within the catalogs of this decade, each major separated the general and

discipline requirements, which is the first time this was done. Once again, the only course common to all students continues to be six credits of English Composition.

Through the end of the 1980's, the general requirements for the bachelor's degrees continued to evolve. There was a pronounced priority on establishing a strong breadth component to the student's experience. The themes which defined the earlier 1980's were removed and replaced with three curricular objectives: (a) to provide basic intellectual skills and breadth of knowledge through the humanities, math, social science, and natural science, (b) to provide a connection between the student and workplace through a career foundation course and/or practical experience, and (c) to provide an area of in-depth study (major). Each program would require their students to take the following: (a) Basic Skills of Literacy (6 credits/prescribed), (b) Quantitative Analysis (3credits/distribution), (c) Historical Understanding (3credits/distribution), (d) Appreciation of Cultures (6 credits/prescribed), (e) Awareness of Social Science (6 credits/prescribed), (f) Understanding of Natural Science and Impact of Technology (10credits/prescribed and distribution), (g) Knowledge of Great Literature (3credits/distribution), (h) Appreciation of Art (3credits/distribution), (h) Sensitivity to Ethics and Political Issues (3credits/prescribed), and (i) Understanding Computers (3credits/prescribed).

All foundational courses must have been completed within the first 30 hours of credit. All students, therefore, were required to take prescribed courses from the areas above thus expanding the common requirements of the general education curriculum. The remaining would be completed with liberal art-based electives from a distribution list. Many of these courses followed an innovative interdisciplinary, project-based structure.

Many of the requirements of the late 1980's remained through the early aspects of the 1990's. However, they became known as *Core Curriculum* versus *General Requirements*. The

1990-1991 Catalog was the first document to acknowledge the importance of each student becoming competent in both effective communication and critical thinking for success in the student's future career. Westbrook College maintained this curriculum through the transition period which followed the merger with the University of New England in 1996.

*The 20<sup>th</sup> Century at the developing UNE (St. Francis College).* St. Francis College (SFC) evolved from a liberal arts high school, a high school and junior college, to a four-year liberal arts college preparing Catholic males in 1961. The College received NEASC accreditation in 1966. The primary goals of SFC were to educate a student to become a responsible, compassionate individual while developing skills in critical thinking, written and verbal communication through broad, yet integrated content. While focused on the development of citizenry, the College faculty was also aware of the need to prepare students for success in a career. Programs of study included Biology, English, French, History, Math, Philosophy and pre-professional programs in the areas of medicine, dental, law, theology, and teaching. The curriculum in the Sixties accounted for both, breadth and depth. Typical requirements for the Bachelor of Art degree consisted of 66 credit hours focused on breadth (theology, philosophy, English, foreign language, history, economics, math or science), 30 credits hours within a major, and the remaining variable credits was supplemented by non-major electives. The first two years were reserved for the breath component, while the final two years were for focus on the major requirements. There were no prescribed courses common to all students.

Between 1970 and 1975 the curriculum remained very similar to that of the previous decade. The College introduced options to gain a Bachelor of Science degree. The greatest change was the addition of a year-long *Freshman Integrated Program* which required that all students take 18 credits within a Western tradition theme, six credits of an integrative, small-



group discussion formatted seminar course (similar to Westbrook College), and six electives related to the topic of the seminar. Some programs encouraged independent study and some required field experience. Much like competency-based models that are being implemented in institutions at the present time, SFC introduced the use of waiver exams to enable a student to test out of many of the liberal arts-based courses. The only common course to all students was a full year of Physical Education.

During the mid-1970's, there was significant change to the overall philosophy at St. Francis College. Contributing to this change was the shift in ownership of the College itself. The liberal arts-focused Franciscans left and a Board of Trustees model established control just as other small liberal arts colleges in the area were facing closure. To keep its doors open the College started to restructure its goals and mission. Recognizing that students were demanding an increased emphasis on depth versus the redundancy of breadth, greater variety and flexibility, more field work experience, and the ability to graduate sooner, a new approach was introduced. The College responded with a course system versus credit system, removal of distribution requirements, added a winter semester individually planned study, and the option to complete the undergraduate degree within three years. The course system was designed to allow students to work with faculty to develop more meaningful and, in some cases, more practical learning experiences. It was not based on an hour system so there was more flexibility in the way courses could be offered. The general requirements for all students included completion of 34 courses. These courses were distributed over a minimum of 10 (maximum of 12) within the major, six courses in related or other fields, nine courses within the Center for Liberal Learning, two from each of the other Centers (Center for Life Science, Center for Human Services, and Center for Managerial Studies). The remaining courses were open electives. All students were required to

take a common English Composition course and complete two to three winter terms (dependent on the Catalog year), with at least one in the first-year. Of note, the administration also acknowledged the need for more career-oriented majors by adding several additional programs to each Center.

The 1970's ended with the merger of the St. Francis College and the New England College of Osteopathic Medicine to become the University of New England. The curriculum was similar to the previous years; 34 courses, minimum 10 in major, and six courses in related or other fields. However, the liberal education aspect was simplified by requiring all freshmen to take an Introduction to Liberal Learning course and all sophomores to take an interdisciplinary Inter-Center Course. The remaining course distribution included at least two courses from the non-major Centers. All students were required to take English Composition.

The curriculum changes at UNE continued throughout the 1980's. There was acknowledgement in the Catalog that St Francis that the undergraduate college of UNE was moving from a traditional liberal arts institution to one with a vocational focus. This change was evidenced by the formation of the College of Health Science of UNE which housed Bachelor of Science degree offerings in Physical Therapy, Occupational Therapy, and Nursing. The University of New England started to branch out and diversify its curricular goals with very little common across Colleges except for general requirements for graduation. It is important to note that the course system was replaced by a credit hour system at this time. With the exception of the Nursing Program, all UNE students, regardless of the College, were required to complete 129 credits, three winter terms (one required Freshmen year), and completion of major requirements. The only common course across all disciplines and required of all students was English Composition.

St. Francis College of UNE (Divisions of Human Services, Life Sciences, Liberal Learning, and Managerial Studies), referred common requirements as the *Common Curriculum*. This curriculum was heavily based on a distribution model; 24 credit hours in Liberal Learning, three credit hours in math, nine credit hours in the social sciences, seven credit hours in the natural sciences, and 15 additional credit hours from three different designated areas (English, modern language, history, fine arts, philosophy, political science, and theology). Introduction to Liberal Learning and Inter-Division courses continued to be common to all St. Francis College of UNE students.

The College of Health Sciences of UNE developed a four year curriculum that consisted of pre-professional and professional phases in the Physical Therapy and Occupational Therapy Programs. The pre-professional phase was completed within the two years and focused on prescribed liberal arts requirements. The Physical Therapy and Occupational Therapy Programs selected their own liberal arts requirements to fulfill the pre-professional phase with variable credit hour obligations. The professional phase was in the final two years and emphasize discipline-based learning. The Nursing Program also had a prescribed curriculum which consisted of liberal arts, humanities, sciences, and the discipline itself. All of these programs returned to a credit hour system as they prepared for accreditation in their respective fields.

Much in line with the Generalist who had a growing concern over the fragmentation of higher education, the many University faculty expressed concern about providing intellectual breadth beyond vocational competence. In the late 1980's and early 1990's, UNE attempted to unify the curriculum and the institution in many ways. St. Francis College was replaced by the College of Arts and Sciences which would house all undergraduate programs. The College of Health Science was removed. Graduation requirements were the same for all undergraduate

students (36-48 credits in major and core requirements). Though variable credit hour requirements remained between disciplines, minimum liberal art-based credits hours were dictated for all undergraduate students within the Common Core Curriculum: communications (10 credits), social sciences (9 credits), life sciences (7credits), and humanities (15 credits). Common courses to all students were English Composition (3credits) and Western Tradition (6 credits). Many of the courses in the Common Core Curriculum for students in the pre-professional phases of physical therapy and occupational therapy were dictated by their respective departments, allowing for student choice only in the humanities.

Through the final decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, UNE continued to grow and revise its curriculum to meet the changing needs of students and its greater community. In the earlier 1990's much of the curriculum remained as it was in at the end of the eighties. Certificate programs were added in Secondary Education and Athletic Training to provide students a path towards credentials in both areas. Minors were encouraged in many of the non-health centered fields (women's studies, peace studies, international studies, humanities, and so forth). By 1994, the College of Professional and Continuing Studies was formed to house health-focused graduate degrees. At this same time, divisions were renamed departments to better accommodate career-oriented fields. This was intended to encourage faculty with a common mission to work together to integrate necessary material into a meaningful experience and avoid redundancy (e.g. Department of Health Science included the Nursing, Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy Programs, College of Osteopathic Medicine, and the College of Professional and Continuing Studies).

In 1995, UNE revised its graduation requirements and renamed their core curriculum to the *University Core*. To graduate, all undergraduate students were to complete 120 credits by

combining the core and major requirements and complete general electives, thus encouraging students to branch out to individual areas of interest. The University Core used a tiered-themed approach to enable students to develop skills for the complexities of the world they would soon face. The themes were created to enable students to become competent in skill areas such as: critical thinking, quantitative reasoning skills, diversity, and effective communication. Students experienced the Environmental Awareness theme in the first year, Social and Global Awareness (SGA) theme in the second year, Critical Thinking theme in the third, and Citizenship theme in their final year. In addition to the themes, courses designated as Explorations, Advanced Humanities, and Cultural Enrichment (art) were also introduced. Explorations were courses chosen from a distribution list in either the humanities or social and behavioral science. All first year students enrolled in an environmental-focused learning community and were placed in two prescribed courses and an integrative seminar. They were also required to elect two courses from the Explorations distribution list and English Composition. The second year consisted of two yearlong prescribed courses in the SGA theme. The third year Critical Thinking theme was incorporated into the major discipline as each department was asked to create field-relevant case studies that emphasized decision making and problem solving. Students would also take an Advanced Humanities courses. In the final year, students would participate in integrative activities involving the courses within the major and the humanities. Activities would contribute to UNE and its greater community. This final year was expected to provide students with a link between their major and general education. At one point, over the courses of four year, students would take one Cultural Enrichment course.

As the 20<sup>th</sup> century neared its end, UNE merged with Westbrook College (1996) and continued to expand the undergraduate programs both the College of Arts and Sciences

(Departments of Education, Chemistry and Physics, Humanities, Life Science, Performance Management, Math and Computer Science, Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, and Social and Behavioral Studies) and the reinvigorated the College of Health Professions (Departments of Dental Hygiene and Nursing). Importantly, both the Occupational Therapy and Physical Therapy Programs would shift from bachelor's degrees to master's degrees over a five year plan. Most of the revision to the core completed in the 1990's remains in the current general education curriculum at UNE, with only minor changes to credit hour requirements within each department and course name changes.

Through the history of UNE there have been multiple revisions in the general education (common core) curriculum. These revisions have shown the cyclical pattern of general education, from very weak-to strong-to balanced-back to weak, and then strong representation once again. Disciplines also communicated various value placed on the liberal arts-based general education curriculum. The Nursing Program was the only health professions program that consistently conveyed the significance of liberal education in its program's description. Both St. Francis and Westbrook Colleges have contributed to the foundation of the general education curriculum prior to and upon merging with UNE. The focus often shifted between the liberal arts to specialized, from integrated to balanced and vice versa. In addition, UNE moved through phases of unifying colleges and then subsequently dividing colleges, the latter resulting in the a University mission statement and each college with a mission statement of its own.

The history of the general education curriculum in higher education institutions in the United States reveals the tension between liberal and specialized education as the general education curriculum battles for presence, value, and, frankly, to be needed. This conflict continues as institutions, like UNE, face the challenges in general education (and higher

education) in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Following the patterns of change in the general education curriculum at UNE, knowledge of its rise, fall, and rise again, can provide a framework to better understand UNE's culture and the formulation of faculty perceptions toward the value of general education. In turn, these components can then help create an innovative and effective general education curriculum revision which will meet and surpass the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

### **General Education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

To better understand general education and its challenges in the current century, one must also consider the state of higher education. The National Postsecondary Student Aid Study for 2007-2008 (as cited in Staley & Trinkle, 2011) showed more diverse systems of institutions which offer multiple choices to the consumer: (a) for-profits have evolved from offering courses-vocational training-to granting associate's, bachelor's, and graduate degrees, (b) partnerships with community colleges and high schools to enhance transferability, (c) college credit for previous life experiences, (d) competency-based accelerated undergraduate options, (e) Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), and online learning, and (f) Hamburger U, McDonald's management training program which now offers college credit. To remain competitive with consumers, higher education institutions must respond to these innovative challenges. General education transformation and clarification of its goals is critical in this process (AAC&U, 2007; Staley & Trinkle, 2011; Word, 2011). Hart Research Associates (2013) expressed that employers were unable to find graduates who possessed both, specialized skills from their discipline and broader, well-rounded attributes, i.e. effective communication, demonstrate intellectual and interpersonal skills, critical thinking, solve complex problems, and have multicultural awareness, to effectively contribute to the success of the workplace. The majority (93%) of the employers interviewed agreed that there should be emphasis on more than just the

undergraduate major area; a liberal arts foundation through general education is also critical. However, several have shown that students, and in some cases, faculty members underestimate the importance of general education in establishing the competencies desired by employers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Jones, 2005; Graff, 2003). In addition, Laff (2006) reported that faculty members do not always clarify the purpose of general education or communicate its value to students. Often, faculty members do not agree that general education is useful as a pathway to skill acquisition and/or vocational preparation (Staley & Trinkle, 2011). Finding coherence amongst all the varied proposed purposes of the general education curriculum is critical to creating a successful and valued general education program (Staley & Trinkle, 2011; Hart Research Associates, 2013; AAC&U, 2007; Morrel & Zimmerman, 2008).

Though there are perceived tensions to consider when developing a general education curriculum that is of value, faculties seem to be in agreement about the importance of outcomes desired from liberal education. Dressel insists “We must have humane, socially conscious, and responsible specialists in all fields, not specialists who pursue their work with complete disregard for its effects on the community, the nation, and the world” (as cited in Mincer, 2011, p. 85). General education is the link between the two worlds and has potential to enable the use of liberal arts to inform professional education and vice versa. The *how*, i.e. method, to accomplish this outcome is often negotiated and is critical to the success of general education.

Though there is often debate about the most effective way to balance general education between the liberal and professional education, there is an agreement about its underlying purpose. The primary goal of general education is to provide students with essential knowledge, skills, and competencies for their career and role as a citizen in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (AAC&U, 2010; Menand, 2010). The AAC&U’s Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP) campaign



urges that all students should be knowledgeable in the areas of *human cultures and the physical and natural world* through the study of liberal arts components (science and mathematics, social sciences, humanities, histories, languages, and the arts). Students should show competency in both *intellectual and practical skills* such as inquiry and analysis, critical and creative thinking, written and oral communication, quantitative literacy, information literacy, teamwork, and problem solving across the curriculum. In addition, students should demonstrate *personal and social responsibility* through exhibiting civic engagement, intercultural knowledge, ethical reasoning and action, and skills needed for lifelong learning. Learning should be integrative and applied with evidence of advancement across the curriculum (AAC&U, 2007). General education is in the unique position of providing an unwavering link between colleges at an institution while reflecting the rapidly changing constructs of the greater society.

### **General Education and Faculty Perceptions**

General education curriculum is a social construct constantly shifting with societal and/or institutional needs (Martin, 1994; Mendez, 2006). Its purpose, goals, and requirements are habitually being negotiated. Mendez (2006) suggests the confusion and contradictions regarding its value and best practices can usually be traced back to indecisive and uninformed attempts to reform its structure. Knowing how and when to repair general education programs requires understanding of its current state. Faculty at many institutions do not know what the general education program should even look like or what purpose it should serve and therefore are uncertain as to how to assess its effectiveness and value. Newton (2000) describes general education as an indication of the perceptions, passion, and goals of the faculty members. Therefore, faculty members must be represented in its development (Hactmann, 2012; Magdola, 1999; Newton, 2000). At the same time, faculty members must be committed to the task of

creating a curriculum that will meet contemporary needs of the greater society and promote essential learning outcomes, while working through internal and external tensions and conserving the mission and unique culture of the institution (AAC&U, 2007).

To develop a meaningful and successful general education curriculum, identifying faculty perceptions is a logical starting point (Sellers, 1989; Dressel, Mayhew, & McGrath, 1959; Dressel & Lorimer, 1960; Sears, 1994). How one perceives general education can provide insight into how well its values, purposes, and goals are infiltrating the culture of the institution (Gano-Philips & Wang, 2013). Much of the research on faculties' perceptions of the general education curriculum is derived from the need for curriculum reform. The focus of such research has ranged from those studies that investigate faculty members' perceptions of what general education curriculum should look like and the perceived lack of coherence between faculty members of the liberal arts and professions.

There is limited data on the curriculum characteristics valued to actually sustain quality general education or *how* the perceived lack of coherence was created. Because faculty members often control the general education curriculum, their perceptions of general education and its value can provide insight into the culture of the institution and perhaps lay the foundation for sustainable, coherent revision while creating a more valued learning experience. Reviewing the previous perception research enables one to trace the cyclical nature of general education and the continuous tensions surrounding its value. The Institute of Higher Education at Columbia University conducted several perception studies which were the subject of replication studies in years to follow (Dressel, Mayhew, & McGrath, 1959; Dressel & Lorimer, 1960). From these studies, certain patterns emerged: (a) professional faculty members tend to favor liberal arts courses which most contributed to their own professional fields, (b) liberal arts faculty members

were often surprised by the level of importance professional faculty members place on liberal art components, and (c) both liberal arts and professional faculty members shared strong support for general education. Because there was a level of agreement, it was suggested that the development of a meaningful general education curriculum could and should be a collaborative effort. At the same time, researchers urged this potential collaboration would require a clearly defined purpose of the general education curriculum. Several studies would soon follow these earlier inquiries to investigate the level of agreement and what aspects would best contribute to a clearly defined purpose of the general education curriculum.

Perhaps the most direct account of faculty members' perceptions concerning the general education curriculum is a dissertation by N.J. Sellers (1989). The purpose of the study was to solicit the beliefs of faculty members from both the college of Arts and Sciences and Engineering (professional) from the University of Alabama. Sellers suggested that understanding the similarities and differences in regard to best practice for general education within and between the two colleges would create a more meaningful experience for the students. The faculty members approved a general education curriculum at the University of Alabama in 1981. This curriculum included 50 credits across three knowledge areas: deductive reasoning (mathematics), inductive reasoning (physical, social, and behavioral sciences), and rhetorical reasoning (humanities). The goal with these common requirements was to emphasize the importance of general education competencies regardless of which college the student represented. Sellers included two periods of study, the first in 1981 and then another in 1988. She was interested in exploring the potential of a shift in faculty members' perceptions over a course of time in which a new curriculum was implemented. To describe these perceptions, Sellers developed a questionnaire that was distributed at both time periods. This questionnaire

focused on demographic data which may influence perception (department, age, gender, and rank), how they perceive general education should look (preference for depth or breadth), individual college's general education requirements and how students and faculty advisors selected general education courses. A total of 117 faculty members completed the questionnaire in 1981 (56% response rate), while 145 did so in 1988 (65% response rate). A Chi-square analysis was utilized at a significance level of .05. Sellers found there were no significant differences in demographics of the respondents within or between each time period. In her consideration of faculty members' preference for depth or breadth of study most, regardless of college, preferred breadth over depth as it relates to the *how* of general education. There was no significant shift in this preference over the seven year period. When the components of the three knowledge areas were considered, there was no difference in depth or breadth preference between the colleges or over the span of seven years for requirements in Natural Sciences, Social Sciences, and Humanities. Faculty members were asked to consider *how much* general education should be required of students. It is important to note that the general education requirements for the Arts and Sciences comprise approximately 25% of the undergraduate curriculum. In comparison, only 10% of Engineering (ENG) requirements are within general education or more specifically, in the Humanities. Though perhaps unintentional and unavoidable, this disparity alone may have pointed out a divergence in the worth of general education. Over the course of seven years, the faculty members of the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS) altered their belief that "enough or more than enough" of the undergraduate curriculum was devoted to general education. In 1981, 49% of the CAS faculty members found the requirements to be "enough/more than enough", yet in 1988, this percentage significantly increased to 72% of the faculty ( $p=.003$ ). As the respondents chose "enough/more than enough",

a parallel was observed in the “not enough” qualification; 1981- 51% believed there was not enough general education versus 1988- 28% reported there was not enough general education. The same occurred with the Engineering (ENG) faculty members; 1981-73% versus 1988- 90% responded “enough/more than enough” ( $p = .038$ ), whereas 27% thought it was “not enough” in 1981 versus only 10% in 1988. This data may be indicative of yet another swing in the pendulum over a short seven year period. Of importance, at both phases of the study, those in CAS showed significantly higher “not enough” responses versus ENG, and ENG showed significantly higher “enough/more than enough” when compared to CAS. Overall, over the course of seven years, both faculties were more satisfied with the amount of general education offered in 1998 versus 1981; “enough/more than enough”.

Sellers’ suggested that the timing of general education, its course offerings, and its assessment may enhance the value of general education. Most CAS faculty members preferred that general education requirements should be completed during their first two years of college. Interestingly, a large part of those in ENG preferred students complete the requirements throughout the course of their undergraduate work. In terms of assessment, loosely defined by how faculty members perceived how well the college was fulfilling the general education requirements, CAS faculty members predominantly thought the institution did a “poor” job (57%) versus only 27% of the ENG faculty members believing the same. This “poor” job status significantly changed to “strong” over the seven year period (CAS 32% ( $p = .01$ ), 19% ENG (ns)). It was suggested that this improved rating in CAS, in particular, may be due to the shift from language and mathematics to humanities and the arts. Lastly, CAS faculty members perceived the faculty itself was the primary influence over the general education requirements, whereas ENG believed the accrediting body had the greatest influence. This is a critical finding as it

brings attention to professional programs' ability, or lack thereof, to establish their own value system for general education.

Sellers' indicated that a limitation to her study was that the University of Alabama is a large research university and therefore the faculty perceptions cannot be and should not be generalized to other institutional classifications. It is important to consider faculty perceptions from other institutions such as smaller liberal arts colleges (public, private), community colleges and for-profit online programs. As more research is conducted across the span of institutional classifications, a better understanding of faculty members' perceptions and general education will emerge.

Sears (1994) replicated the Sellers' study at Colorado State University (CSU) which was actively revising their undergraduate experience in hopes of gaining insight into the purpose of general education. He specifically investigated faculty members' perceptions of general education of tenure-track undergraduate faculty of the College of Liberal Arts (LA), Natural Sciences (NS), and Applied Human Sciences (AHS). Like Sellers, Sears considered the two approaches that are typically used to define general education; depth, therefore specialization in a single discipline (liberal education) or breadth, therefore, broadening over a variety of fields (general education). A questionnaire which was adapted from the Sellers' study was utilized and data was analyzed with a Chi-square analysis. Similar to the University of Alabama, most of the CSU faculty members were in agreement over the concept of general education (94.6%) and believed it should be focused on general knowledge in various fields of study versus in-depth study (65.4% vs. 45.1%, respectively). Despite this agreement, only 59.5% of the faculty perceived that the present general education requirements at CSU were fulfilling this purpose. Unlike the earlier phase of Sellers' study, the College of Liberal Arts believed that the prescribed

requirements were fulfilling these goals more so than NS or AHS ( $p=.001$ ). In addition, LA also reported that they felt well informed about general education requirements when compared to the other programs (51% LA vs. 26% NS vs. 23% AHS;  $p<.001$ ) which may inform the perception of purpose fulfillment result. It is important to mention, like the Sellers' study, the majority of the faculty (66.4%) "strongly agreed/agreed" that the general education requirements were adequate (37 of the 128 total required credits).

The general education curriculum typically involves a common, interdisciplinary, often themed approach which may be most effective when taken within the first two years of college. However, Sears' results showed that faculty members were basically split between having common courses for all students and an interdisciplinary and themed approach. When these facets were investigated for congruence between the colleges, significant differences emerged; more faculty from the College of Liberal Arts believed all students should have a common curriculum despite the college or discipline (48% LA vs. 30.3% NS. vs. 21.7% AHS;  $p=.021$ ); the majority of AHS faculty believed that general education should be interdisciplinary and themed when compared to LA and NS ( $p=.001$ ). Though there was no significant difference between colleges, only 57.1% believed that general education requirements should be completed within the first two years of study. These results suggest that, though many agree in the concept of general education, there is still no clear majority declaring the best way to define *how* general education can best meet its goals. In fact, only 46.5% of the faculty agreed that learning outcomes assessments evaluating achievement of the goals should be required in general education. Applied Health Science faculty members, which is perhaps most familiar with competency-based education, was significantly in more support of the role assessment should play in general education when compared to LA and NS ( $p=.003$ ). This causes one to question

not only the value placed on general education outcomes, but also the role that rigor may have in the implied value of the general education curriculum.

Integration of curricula across the institution is often stalled by perceived tensions between those who think that integration can take place between the major and general education and those who trust in a more traditional liberal arts-based general education program. Hacker and Dreifus (2010) reported that the best way to ease tensions or avoid conflict between the two approaches would be to simply not offer majors focused on vocations. Most find this to be a harsh conclusion without ample examination of these perceived tensions (Albano, 2007; Domholdt, 1987; Mincer, 2011). Albano (2007) conducted a related study at Richard Stockton College, a liberal arts institution experiencing growth in professional education. The expanding curricular needs of these professional programs threatened the focus on liberal arts. Stockton College requires professional education faculty members to teach one general education course per year. Other faculty members are required to teach one course each semester. Albano specifically interviewed faculty members from the business program housed in Professional Studies. She asked the professional faculty members to discuss how they thought they were perceived by non-professional faculty members. Several themes emerged: (a) professional faculty was not as committed to the general education as others, (b) if they were not committed to general education, they were also not committed to liberal education, (c) many in the liberal arts college do not think professional education should be a focus of the institution, and (d) many in the liberal colleges found professional education to be a vocational program and not academic. Professional educators perceived tension between the programs. When asked to provide their meaning or understanding of liberal education, however, most shared the traditional definitions and agreed upon its importance and place in higher education. They expressed that they would



willingly integrate the professional curriculum (and courses) with liberal arts components.

Domholdt (1987) also found that physical therapy faculty members believed this integration was important, as long as it was in physical therapy context. Lastly, Albano (2007) reported that professional faculty members were hopeful that liberal educators would also come to identify and appreciate their dedication to and understanding of general education and the between the common ground between the two approaches.

More recently, Rosario (2012) conducted a mixed-methods study which focused on general education curricular structure in health science-focused institutions. She set out to determine if the curricula was prescriptive and specific as defined by Bergquist's Career Model of curriculum (Bergquist, 1977). By examining catalogs and websites of 38 programs and interviewing general education leaders at six of the institutions, Rosario found that general education was very prescriptive in 71% of the participating institutions. Therefore the student's major discipline primarily determined general education courses most appropriate for their students with little choice or flexibility. These results may explain some differences in perceptions between liberal arts and professional faculty when considering its structure and value. Rosario's work suggested that health professions' hands may be tied when it comes to establishing and retaining its general education requirements. However, Mincer (2011) showed just how important it may be to have coherence in the purpose of general education curriculum between the two Colleges to enhance the perception of value in the general education curriculum.

As professional education expands its role in higher education, there has been an ongoing lack of coherence between two primary approaches; knowledge for its own sake and knowledge for utility sake. Inevitably, the continuous conflict over the purpose of higher education

contributes to the confusion surrounding the purpose and implementation of general education at institutions that house both approaches (e.g. health science-focused institutions). Domholdt (1987) investigated the attitudes surrounding the actual “fit” of undergraduate physical therapy preparation programs into liberal arts institutions. Fifty-seven faculty members from 11 programs completed a survey and on-site visitations were conducted at two institutions. It was found that the majority of physical therapy faculty members perceived that the goals and purposes of undergraduate education are the same as the liberal arts faculty; they strongly believe in the value of humanities and a broad versus specialized education. Of interest, both of the case study institutions were in the midst of adjusting their physical therapy preparation programs due to the belief that liberal arts provided valuable content for career preparation. One institution reported that, even though students wanted a program with an emphasis on their chosen specialization, the physical therapy program faculty “pride themselves on their ability to show career-oriented students the relevance of the liberal arts and to instill an appreciation for the interconnectedness of their career and liberal arts studies” (Dumholdt, 1987, p. 134). Physical therapy faculty members also perceived that, not only did they see the importance of liberal arts courses, but they also believe it was important to integrate the concepts of liberal learning into their program and courses. This is important when one considers how to provide a more meaningful general education program by providing coherence between liberal arts-based courses and professional course offerings. The approach will potentially encourage professional students to appreciate and value these liberal concepts through a career-based perspective.

To best establish a sense of coherence between the program types, it is important to understand the relationship between the faculty members involved in the liberal arts and professions. Mincer (2011) conducted a similar study to Domhodlt (1987) which examined the

perceived relationship between the liberal and professions faculty at an institution classified by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching as “Bal/SGC:Balanced arts & sciences/profession, some graduate coexistence” (Carnegie classifications as cited in Mincer, 2011, p. 26). Much like Domholdt’s work (1987), this research was developed upon the rationale that professional students may be overly focused on career preparation and therefore do not view courses that are not directly connected to this preparation as valuable. As a result, there is often perceived tension between the faculties of the College of Liberal Arts (CLA) and the College of Health Professions (CHP). This tension could, in turn, influence the perceptions of what may create a meaningful general education curriculum as these two faculty groups attempt to collaborate on its design.

For the study, Mincer (2011) first completed a qualitative phase which consisted of individual (CLA-3 faculty; CHP-3 faculty) and focus-group interviews to develop statements which informed the quantitative web-survey phase of the study. It is important to note that Mincer was a CHP faculty member and conducted the phase one interviews of participants from both Colleges. This serves as a possible limitation to the study especially as it pertains to how that may have influenced faculty responses. The individual and focus-group responses, though insightful and fascinating, will only be discussed in relationship to the survey which was distributed across both Colleges. Responses represent faculty from Languages, Literature and Philosophy (18% of respondents), Art, Music and Theater (13.5% of respondents), History (11.2% of respondents), Nursing (15.7% of respondents), and Health Science (12.4% respondents). From the data, some themes emerge that may influence the faculty perception of the value of general education. As seen in other studies (Sears, 1994; Sellers; 1989; and Dumholdt, 1987) faculty from both Colleges agree on the general purpose of higher education

and both claim to have a good understanding of general education and how it helps fulfill this purpose. The majority of the CLA faculty significantly agreed more to specific statements related to the purpose of general education than the CHP faculty. There was also agreement that liberal learning is critical for students in the health professions. From these statements one can surmise, yet cannot generalize to all institutions, that faculty find value in general education and competencies related to liberal learning, however, defining the components that establish this value may not be as clear. Interestingly, the majority of the faculty members from both CLA and CHP agree that many students continue to perceive general education as an obstacle to clear before their in-depth, in-major study. Underlying lack of coherence between the faculty that may send a convoluted message about the purpose of general education and its value. Possible areas of influential incoherence are as follows: (a) the amount of general education required of students, (b) the role of professional programs, its faculty and courses, in general education, (c) the level of collaboration between the Colleges, and (d) the perceived tensions and assumptions between faculty from CLA and CHP. Overall, to enable students to value general education more faculty members from CLA and CHP must understand, collaborate, develop, and clearly *communicate* a cohesive, well-defined purpose to all students, across both Colleges.

Perhaps the reason for the continuous questions concerning the general education curriculum is derived from faculty perceptions of the value of general education. Understanding faculty value systems may either explain why students interpret general education as an obstacle to their “real education” or it may promote its importance to students when they consider their professional and personal lives. Research that has examined faculty perceptions of the value of general education directly is quite limited. Gano-Phillips & Wang (2013) conducted a cross-cultural (Hong Kong versus United States (US) institutions) comparison study between student

and faculty perceptions. They believed it was important to identify perceptions so to assist in the meaningful curriculum reform. They also anticipated that gaining a better understanding of the perceptions may enable those in academia to change any unfavorable perceptions of general education. Although not specific to faculty perceptions alone, the results remain informative. In the both institutions, faculty members perceived the achievement of the valued outcomes significantly more than students in terms of providing *personal development*, *higher order thinking*, *teamwork*, and *skill development* ( $p < .01$ ). Interestingly, Hong Kong faculty perceived significantly greater emphasis on general education's *knowledge development*, whereas US faculty perceived skill development to be of greater importance.

More recently the University of Alaska Anchorage's (UAA) Office of Undergraduate Academic Affairs (General Education Requirements Assessment Task Force, 2014) conducted a quantitative study as part of their general education requirements assessment (GERA). A web-based survey was completed by 391 faculty members across the College of Arts and Sciences, College of Business and Public Policy, College of Education, College of Engineering, and College of Health. The participating faculty ranged from adjunct to tenured faculty. The majority of the faculty agreed that components of the general education curriculum were of value to the students' development. The results showed that the general education curriculum was important in terms of (in order of most value to lesser): (a) preparing students for overall academic success, (b) developing well-rounded students, (c) preparing students for academic success in their program, (d) preparing students for the workplace, and (e) developing students capacity for citizen effectiveness. The level of agreement was across programs in liberal and professional education and also involved liberal and professional education outcomes. This is important to point out because it may signify areas of value that may promote cohesiveness and

potential for collaboration. The current research will add to the dialogue about emphasized or agreed upon value faculty finds in general education and further guide its purpose and development.

In summary, the perceptions of faculty members can be critical in the development of a meaningful general education curriculum. There appears to be consistent support for breadth-based general education from faculty of both, liberal arts and professional programs (Sears, 1994; Sellers, 1989; Dressel, Mayhew, & McGrath, 1959; Dressel & Lorimer, 1960; Domhodt, 1987; Mincer, 2011; AAU GERA Task Force, 2014). However, there is also evidence that faculty members from professional programs are most supportive of general education courses that are within their professional discipline (Dressel, Mayhew, & McGrath, 1959; Dressel & Lorimer, 1960). At the same time, liberal arts faculty members tend to believe more courses within the liberal arts should be represented in the general education requirements. Overall, there remains little clarity and congruence about how to best fulfill or assess these requirements to assure its value. Much of the previous research has focused on the perceived purpose of general education and what it should look like. Perhaps understanding how the faculty perceives the actual value of general education (is it a meaningful experience for faculty, what makes it meaningful, what would add value for the faculty, etc.) would provide insight into its reform and dilute some of the resistance to change commonly imposed by faculty members (Sears, 1994).

## **Conclusion**

Literature reviews were presented on four primary areas in Chapter 2. To grasp the concept of general education, varied definitions were reviewed. To contextualize the ebb and flow of the general education curriculum, its history was reviewed. This review highlighted the tensions between the traditional liberal arts and specialized education. The evolution of the

general education curriculum at UNE and its founding colleges, St. Francis and Westbrook College, were also examined to provide insight into the culture of UNE through a historical lens. To gain an understanding of the changing needs of general education, its status and recommended purpose in the 21<sup>st</sup> century were reviewed. Finally, because faculty often informs general education reform, literature, though limited, which focused on faculty members' perceptions of the purpose and value of general education was presented. In the following chapter, methodology for the current study, as informed by the review of literature will be discussed.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

To investigate the faculty members' perceptions of the purpose and value of the general education curriculum at the University of New England, the researcher used the procedures and methods outlined in this chapter. The chapter includes the purpose of the study, methodology and rationale, population and sample, instrumentation, setting, data collection, and data analysis. A summary of the procedures is also provided.

#### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this research is to describe and compare College of Arts and Sciences' and Westbrook College of Health Professions' faculty perceptions towards the purpose and value of the general education curriculum. Specifically, the study was designed to seek answers to the following research questions:

1. How do faculty members who teach in the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of New England perceive the purpose and value of the general education curriculum?
2. How do faculty members who teach in the Westbrook College of Health Professions and the University of New England perceive the purpose and value of the general education curriculum?
3. Are there differences in the perceptions towards the purpose and value of the general education curriculum between faculty members who teach in the College of Arts and



Sciences and the Westbrook College of Health Professions at the University of New England?

### **Research Methodology and Rationale**

The researcher investigated the perceptions of undergraduate faculty members from the College of Arts and Sciences and the Westbrook College of Health Professions towards the purpose and value of the general education curriculum through the use of a cross-sectional design survey and a semi-structured, open-ended interview (Creswell, 2012). A convergent-nested, mixed-methods approach was utilized with concurrent implementation of quantitative and qualitative strands within a single phase of the study. Both strands were of equal priority. An independent level of interaction between the two strands was maintained throughout data analysis until the final interpretation of the results. The analysis of the quantitative strand provided a statistical comprehension of the research problem while the qualitative strand cultivated these findings by providing an exploration of and depth to the faculty members' perceptions (Creswell, 2003; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

The mixed-methods research design combined the quantitative and qualitative methods and emphasized their strengths to generate a more expansive understanding of a research question than either alone (Rosario, 2012; Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Tashakkori & Creswell, 2007; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2004b). This approach was implemented to allow for the following: (a) a triangulation of findings for corroboration, (b) for complementarity to illustrate or further elaborate results, (c) to expand inquiry, (d) offset weaknesses associated with quantitative and qualitative methods when used alone, and (e) improve utility of findings (Bryman, 2006). As these intentions merged during the interpretive discussion of results, there was a more complete understanding of the faculty members' perceptions of the purpose and

value of the general education curriculum at the University of New England (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2010).

### **Population and Sample**

All College of Arts and Sciences (CAS) and Westbrook College of Health Professions' (WCHP) faculty members, full-time, part-time, and adjunct at the University of New England were asked to participate in the study. Because this research was site-specific to the two Colleges (CAS, WCHP) at the University of New England, it was assumed that this research setting has its own distinctive social construct that cannot be generalized to all like-universities (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). A convergent-nested model of inquiry/or was employed. For the quantitative strand, undergraduate faculty members representing the CAS and WCHP were asked, via an email invitation, to complete the online survey. For the qualitative strand, a stratified purposeful sampling method was used; CAS and WCHP faculty members who participated in the quantitative strand were divided into subgroups, i.e. those CAS faculty members who do not teach in the general education curriculum, those CAS faculty members who do teach in the general education curriculum, and WCHP faculty members who do not teach in the general education curriculum. A purposeful sample of twelve faculty members was derived from these homogenous subgroups, four from each, to provide interview textual data (Morgan, 1988; Collins, Onwuegbuzie, & Jio, 2007; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Saadeddine, 2013). Having representation from each homogenous sub-group assured a comprehensive understanding of how faculty members perceive the purpose and value of the general education curriculum.

There were 191 undergraduate faculty members asked to participate in the study. For the quantitative strand, 61 survey responses were received; however, five of these surveys were started but never completed. Therefore 56 surveys were deemed useable for an overall response

rate of 29.3% which was considered acceptable. Of the 56 participants, 34 (60.7%) were from the College of Arts and Sciences and 22 (39.3%) were from the Westbrook College of Health Professions. For the qualitative strand, the same 191 undergraduate faculty members were asked to participate in the interview process. Of those that completed the survey, a total of 28 faculty members, 18 CAS faculty members and 10 WCHP faculty members volunteered to be interviewed. Eight individuals were then randomly selected to meet one on one with the researcher for a 60 minute interview. Four of these individuals were CAS faculty members who reported that they teach a course that is within the general education curriculum, four CAS and four WCHP faculty members who reported that they do not teach in the general education curriculum.

Demographic information was collected on faculty members who participated in the online survey and the interviews. Table 1 provides a summary of this information. The majority of the participants was from the College of Arts and Sciences (60.7%,  $f=34$ ), full-time (85.7%,  $f=48$ ), and were primarily non-tenured at the time of the survey (73.2%,  $f=41$ ). Most of the respondents have been teaching at UNE for more than 10 years (37.1%,  $f=21$ ). Of importance, the majority of the participants reported that they did not teach within the general education curriculum (55.4%,  $f=31$ ). In terms of the interviews, a total of 12 survey participants agreed to be interviewed and their demographics are summarized as follows: (a) four CAS faculty whom do not currently teach in the general education program (2 non-tenured-full-time, 1 tenured-full-time, and 1 adjunct), (b) four CAS faculty whom currently teach in the general education program (2 non-tenured- full-time, 1 tenured-full-time, and 1 adjunct), and c) four WCHP faculty whom do not currently teach in the general education program (4 non-tenured, full-time faculty).

Table 1

*Demographic Information of Survey Sample (N=56)*

|                       | <i>f</i> | %    |
|-----------------------|----------|------|
| College               |          |      |
| WCHP                  | 22       | 39.3 |
| CAS                   | 34       | 60.7 |
| Employment            |          |      |
| Full-time             | 48       | 85.7 |
| Part-time             | 2        | 3.6  |
| Adjunct               | 6        | 10.7 |
| Status                |          |      |
| Tenured               | 15       | 26.8 |
| Non-tenured           | 41       | 73.2 |
| # of years at UNE     |          |      |
| First year            | 4        | 7.4  |
| 1-3 years             | 11       | 19.6 |
| 4-6 years             | 11       | 19.6 |
| 7-9 years             | 9        | 16.1 |
| >10 years             | 21       | 37.1 |
| # of GE courses teach |          |      |
| None                  | 31       | 55.4 |
| 1                     | 15       | 26.8 |
| 2-3                   | 8        | 14.3 |
| 4-5                   | 2        | 3.4  |

*Note.* CAS=College of Arts and Sciences; WCHP=Westbrook College of Health Professions.

**Instrumentation**

Quantitative data were collected by a web-based, cross-sectional Likert-type survey (Appendix A) administered via REDcap® (Research Electronic Data Capture). The survey was adapted from several perception-based general education studies (Rosario, 2012; Johnson-Garcia, 2010; Mincer, 2011; Sears, 1994). Likert-type questions were designed to address faculty perceptions of the purpose and value of the general education curriculum. Responses were based on measures of agreement, i.e. strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, and strongly disagree). Several questions inquired about faculty members' demographic information: (a) College affiliation, (b) current employment status, (c) academic

rank, (d) years at UNE, and (e) involvement with the general education curriculum at the University of New England. Overall 33 Likert-type items were used to collect data focused on the perceptions of the purpose of the general education curriculum. Twenty-two items were used to collect data focused on the perceptions of the value of the general education curriculum. The survey also included four open-ended questions to provide the participants an opportunity to comment further on their responses and/or add their own additional comments and unanticipated perspectives.

The qualitative strand of the research involved one-on-one, semi-structured phone or face to face interviews. All interviews were recorded utilizing an iPad and Notability®, an audio recording application. Six primary open-ended questions were developed to answer the research questions. Each primary question had additional sub-questions to prompt additional information. The overall literature review (Chapter 2) helped guide the development of the interview questions which focused on both, the purpose and value of the general education curriculum. Due to the stratified purposeful sampling, the interviews also enabled further clarification and potential complimentary insight into the sub-groups; CAS faculty members who teach general education ( $n=4$ ), CAS faculty members who do not teach general education ( $n=4$ ), and WCHP faculty members who do not teach general education ( $n=4$ ). The questions, sub-questions, and instructions to the participant are provided in Appendix B.

## **Setting**

Currently the University of New England is categorized as a private, not-for profit “Bal/SGC” institution by the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education. This indicates that UNE offers a balance between the arts and sciences and professions with some graduate coexistence. The University of New England is comprised of the College of Arts and

Sciences (Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctorate degrees conferred), Westbrook College of Health Professions (Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctorate degrees conferred), College of Dental Medicine (Doctorate degree conferred), College of Osteopathic Medicine (Master's and Doctorate degree conferred), and the College of Pharmacy (Doctorate degree conferred). There are currently 47 undergraduate majors, seven of which are offered by WCHP (Applied Exercise Science, Athletic Training, Dental Hygiene, Nursing, Public Health, and Health, Wellness and Occupational Studies). A complete summary of all undergraduate majors are provided in Appendix C. The University of New England is regionally accredited by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges/Colleges Commission on Institutions of Higher Education (NEASC/CIHE). Its next full accreditation evaluation is in 2017. Several undergraduate professional programs are also accredited through their specific governing body, i.e., the Commission on Accreditation of Athletic Training Education (CAATE), Accreditation Council for Business Schools and Programs (ACBSP), American Dental Association Commission on Dental Accreditation, and the National League for Nursing Accrediting Commission (NLNAC).

Due to NEASC requirements, each undergraduate student at UNE is required to take 40 credits of general education. The current general education program at the University of New England is incorporated into the "Core" of the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS) and the "Common Curriculum" of the Westbrook College of Health Professions (WCHP). In addition to fulfilling the "Common Curriculum", WCHP students are also required to take some courses within the "Core". How this is implemented is variable between WCHP programs. A description of NEASC requirements for a general education program is provided in Appendix D.

## **Data Collection**

Data for the study were collected by the researcher using quantitative and qualitative strands. Quantitative data were obtained by utilizing the web-based survey as explained previously in this chapter. This was used to determine faculty members' perceptions of the purpose and value of the general education curriculum. Qualitative data, also explained earlier in this chapter, were used to gain further insight into faculty members' perceptions of the purpose and value of the general education curriculum.

Upon receiving exemption status from the UNE Institutional Review Board, the researcher initiated the data collection phase of the study. A total of 191 undergraduate faculty members from both, the College of Arts and Sciences and the Westbrook College of Health Professions received an invitation to participate email explaining the study (Appendix E). This email provided the purpose and significance of the study, the process to ensure confidentiality, and an invitation to participate in the study, with survey only or survey and interview options. Upon email receipt of the participants' responses agreeing to participate in the survey and/or interview, the researcher then sent out an email with an informed consent (Appendix F). Once the informed consent was returned to the researcher, a link to the REDcap® survey was emailed to the participant. The first response rate was 12%. A reminder email (Appendix G) was sent and the overall response rate, for both Colleges, increased to 29.3%. Table 2 provides a summary for the sample response rates by College.

Faculty members who indicated they were interested in being interviewed were categorized by previously described sub-groups: (a) CAS faculty members teaching in general

Table 2

*Summary of Sample Response Rate by College*

| College       | Emails Sent | Surveys Returned | Response Rate |
|---------------|-------------|------------------|---------------|
| CAS           | 147         | 34               | 23.1%         |
| WCHP          | 44          | 22               | 50.0%         |
| Both Colleges | 191         | 56               | 29.3%         |

*Note.* CAS=College of Arts and Sciences; WCHP=Westbrook College of Health Professions.

education, (b) CAS faculty members not teaching in general education, and (c) WCHP faculty members. The researcher then provided each of these participants a participant code which was utilized to randomly select twelve individuals, four from each listed sub-group. Use of the participant code assured against researcher bias when randomly selecting interview participants. From the 56 respondents, a total of 28 faculty members, 18 CAS and 10 WCHP faculty members volunteered to be interviewed. Of the 18 CAS faculty members, eight reported that they were teaching within the general education and 10 were not teaching in general education. Four participants were randomly selected from each sub-group. These participants were then contacted by the researcher, by email, to designate a time and location most convenient for the participant. Interview durations varied between 30 and 60 minutes. All interviews were recorded utilizing an iPad and Notability®, an audio recording application and subsequently transcribed verbatim by the researcher. All participants received a participant code (CASGE#, CASNGE#, WCHP#) that was used to identify the transcriptions; there was no link between the transcription and the participant's identity.

### **Data Analysis**

Due to the convergent mixed methods approach utilized in the current research, quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed independent of each other (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The results of the inquiry were then merged within the interpretation of the results



to develop a complete understanding of the faculty perceptions, to corroborate the results, to emphasize the strengths while off-setting the weaknesses of both strands when independent, to enhance the credibility of the findings, and improve the utility of the findings relative to general education reform (Greene, Caracelle, & Graham, 1989; Bryman, 2006).

The data collected for this study were analyzed using: (a) IBM® Statistical Package for Social Behavior® (SPSS) PC Version 23, and (b) QSR® NVivo 11 Plus, a qualitative data analysis software package used to complement traditional coding process.

For the quantitative strand, all Likert-type data from the survey was imported from REDcap® into SPSS. Descriptive data (mean and standard deviation) was provided for CAS and WCHP faculty members' perceptions of the purpose and value of the general education curriculum. An independent t-test was used to assess differences in faculty members' perceptions of the purpose and value of the general education curriculum between the College of Arts and Sciences and the Westbrook College of Health Professions. The level of significance throughout the quantitative strand was set at the .05 level.

For the qualitative strand, a thematic analysis of transcribed interview responses was conducted (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Mincer, 2011). As Thomas (2003) reports, a content analysis involves: (a) an abbreviation of textual data describing faculty members' perceptions, (b) identification of raw emerging themes found amongst the perceptions, and (c) a coding of these themes. All recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim in Microsoft® Word software and then reviewed by the researcher for accuracy of responses. This repetitive process enabled the researcher to become very familiar with the textual data. The transcriptions were then imported into the NVivo software which helped identify potential themes through a word frequency query of the most used keywords. This provided a starting point for more in depth

analysis. The response transcriptions were then manually reread, coded, and categorized into overarching themes. To identify the codes, the researcher utilized thematic identification techniques as suggested by Ryan and Bernard (2003): (a) repetition, (b) metaphors or analogies to express meaning, (c) connector words and transitional statements, and (d) differences and similarities within a respondent's answer and between the respondents. Following repetitive content analysis, themes and sub-themes emerged to describe faculty members' perceptions towards the purpose and value of the general education curriculum.

### **Summary of the Procedures Used to Conduct the Study**

The purpose of this research is to describe and compare College and Arts and Sciences' and Westbrook College of Health Professions' faculty perceptions of the purpose and value of the general education curriculum. In order to conduct the study, the researcher followed the procedures outline below:

1. Data were gathered related to the population of undergraduate faculty members from the College of Arts and Sciences and the Westbrook College of Health Professions at the University of New England, Maine.
2. The population was selected.
3. Instruments to determine perceptions of the purpose and value of general education were developed.
4. An acceptable return rate was established.
5. An email explaining and inviting faculty members to participate was sent.
6. A follow-up email was sent to those who did not respond to the initial request one week after the first request.

7. Those faculty members agreeing to participate in the survey or survey and interview were then sent an email with an attached informed consent. They were asked to read, sign, and return the informed consent either through intercampus mail or email.
8. A reminder email was sent out to remind participants to read, sign, and return the informed consent.
9. Upon receipt of the signed informed consent, a link to the survey was provided and the researcher randomly selected. The research then contacted interview participants via email to set up a convenient interview location and time.
10. Data were obtained and recorded for each respondent.
11. Each respondent participating in the survey and interview was placed in a category based on his or her College affiliation (CAS or WCHP). Additionally, each interview participant was placed in three categories based on their affiliation with the general education curriculum (CAS teaching general education, CAS not teaching general education, and WCHP).
12. Frequencies and percentages among each group were computed.
13. Using SPSS, descriptive data were provided for each group and independent t-tests were used to compare the differences between CAS and WCHP faculty members' perceptions to the purpose and value of the general education curriculum.
14. Using NVivo and manual coding techniques, a content thematic analysis was completed to develop overarching themes in terms of faculty members' perceptions towards the purpose and value of general education.
15. Data were analyzed, interpreted, conclusions were drawn, and recommendations were presented.

In summary, Chapter 3 presented the methodology for conducting this study describing the population and sample, the instrumentation, data collection, and data analysis techniques.

The data derived from the research instruments will be presented in Chapter 4.

## CHAPTER 4

### ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

The purpose of this chapter is to present answers to the research questions including the results from the analysis of the Faculty Perceptions of General Education Survey and the thematic analysis. Surveys were sent electronically to 191 full-time, part-time, and adjunct undergraduate faculty members. The overall response rate was 29.3% which was considered acceptable. Responses were received from 56 undergraduate faculty members: 34 (60.7%) were from the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS), and 22 (39.3%) were from the Westbrook College of Health Professions (WCHP). Twelve participated in both, the survey and interview sessions; four from CAS who teach in the general education curriculum, four from CAS who do not teach in the curriculum, and four from WCHP.

The three research questions addressed in this study were:

1. How do faculty members who teach in the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of New England perceive the purpose and value of the general education curriculum?
2. How do faculty members who teach in the Westbrook College of Health Professions and the University of New England perceive the purpose and value of the general education curriculum?
3. Are there differences in the perceptions of the purpose and value of the general education curriculum between faculty members who teach in the College of Arts and Sciences and the Westbrook College of Health Professions at the University of New England?

## Findings

**Research Question 1.** How do faculty members who teach in the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of New England perceive the purpose and value of general education curriculum?

**Findings for Research Question 1.** To answer the first research question, the survey and interview responses of CAS faculty-respondents ( $n=34$ ) were examined. Findings were reported for CAS faculty-respondents' perceptions of the purpose of general education, followed by their perceptions towards the value of general education. The CAS population information is summarized in Table 3. The majority of the responding faculty from CAS were of full-time status (88.2%,  $f=30$ ), non-tenured (61.7%,  $f=21$ ), and most have been teaching at UNE for more than 10 years (44.1%,  $f=15$ ). Most reported that they teach within the general education curriculum (55.9%,  $f=25$ ) with 17 reporting a high knowledge of the general education (50%).

Table 3

*CAS Faculty-Respondents' Population Information Summary ( $n=34$ )*

|             | <i>f</i> | %    |
|-------------|----------|------|
| Employment  |          |      |
| Full-time   | 30       | 88.2 |
| Part-time   | 1        | 2.9  |
| Adjunct     | 3        | 8.8  |
| Status      |          |      |
| Tenured     | 13       | 38.2 |
| Non-tenured | 21       | 61.7 |

(continued)

Table 3 (continued)

|                                   | <i>f</i> | %    |
|-----------------------------------|----------|------|
| # of years at UNE                 |          |      |
| First year                        | 3        | 8.8  |
| 1-3 years                         | 4        | 11.8 |
| 4-6 years                         | 8        | 23.5 |
| 7-9 years                         | 4        | 11.8 |
| >10 years                         | 15       | 44.1 |
| GE affiliation                    |          |      |
| Does not teach GE courses         | 9        | 38.2 |
| Teaching in GE courses            | 25       | 55.9 |
| Knowledge of GE curriculum at UNE |          |      |
| No knowledge                      | 2        | 5.9  |
| Some knowledge                    | 15       | 44.1 |
| High degree of knowledge          | 17       | 50.0 |

Note. UNE=University of New England; GE= General education.

*CAS faculty-respondents' survey results for perceptions of purpose.* Table 4 displays the number of CAS faculty-respondents per survey item, mean Likert-type scale scores, standard deviations, and standard error means. Participants responded to survey items that represented potential purposes of general education. They were asked to provide a level of agreement, i.e. 5=strongly agree, 4=agree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 2=disagree, and 1=strongly disagree, for each item in terms of their perceptions of what the general education curriculum should provide the student. The CAS faculty-respondents had the highest mean level of agreement in relation to their perception that general education should provide a broader view of the world ( $M=4.8$ ,  $SD=.41$ ), a well-rounded education ( $M=4.6$ ,  $SD=.75$ ), competency in critical thinking and problem-solving skills ( $M=4.6$ ,  $SD=.56$ ), and competency in verbal communication ( $M=4.6$ ,  $SD=.50$ ). On the other hand, CAS faculty had a mean level of disagreement in relation to their perception that general education should provide only a liberal arts focused education ( $M=2.9$ ,  $SD=1.13$ ) and provide a competency in personal finance ( $M=2.9$ ,  $SD=1.13$ ).

Table 4

*Descriptive Survey Data for CAS Faculty-Respondents' Perceptions of the Purpose of General Education in Descending Order*

| GE should provide   | N  | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|---|----|------|----------------|-----------------|
| A broader view of the world   | 34 | 4.8  | .41            | .07             |
| A well-rounded education  | 34 | 4.6  | .75            | .13             |
| Competency in critical thinking and problem-solving skills <sup>b</sup> | 34 | 4.6  | .56            | .10             |
| Competency in verbal communication skills <sup>b</sup>                  | 34 | 4.6  | .50            | .09             |
| Competency in written communication skills <sup>b</sup>                 | 34 | 4.5  | .62            | .11             |
| An understanding of current social and civic issues <sup>c</sup>        | 33 | 4.5  | .51            | .09             |
| An understanding of diversity <sup>c</sup>                              | 34 | 4.3  | .77            | .13             |
| An expanded knowledge of cultures outside America <sup>a</sup>          | 33 | 4.3  | .76            | .13             |
| A sense of values, principles, and ethics <sup>c</sup>                  | 34 | 4.3  | .72            | .12             |
| The ability to use evidence-based to inform decisions <sup>b</sup>      | 34 | 4.2  | .74            | .13             |
| Competency in quantitative reasoning <sup>b</sup>                       | 34 | 4.2  | .72            | .12             |
| An expanded knowledge of American culture <sup>a</sup>                  | 33 | 4.1  | .74            | .13             |

(continued)



Table 4 (continued)

| GE should provide  | N  | Mean | Std.<br>Deviation | Std. Error<br>Mean |
|--|----|------|-------------------|--------------------|
| An understanding of being involved in a community <sup>c</sup> | 33 | 4.1  | .77               | .13                |
| An understanding of environmental sustainability <sup>c</sup>  | 33 | 4.1  | .70               | .12                |
| An experience in the creative arts <sup>a</sup>                | 34 | 4.0  | .92               | .16                |
| An interdisciplinary perspective <sup>d</sup>                  | 33 | 3.9  | 1.0               | .18                |
| An understanding of self and human behavior <sup>c</sup>       | 33 | 3.9  | .70               | .12                |
| An experience with languages <sup>a</sup>                      | 34 | 3.8  | .90               | .16                |
| Preparation for workplace success <sup>b</sup>                 | 33 | 3.7  | .99               | .17                |
| Strong work habits <sup>b</sup>                                | 33 | 3.6  | 1.10              | .20                |
| Competency in computer skills <sup>b</sup>                     | 34 | 3.6  | .93               | .16                |
| An understanding of professionalism                            | 33 | 3.6  | .90               | .16                |
| Strong team building skills <sup>b</sup>                       | 32 | 3.5  | .88               | .16                |
| An understanding of public health <sup>c</sup>                 | 33 | 3.5  | .97               | .17                |
| An understanding of personal health <sup>c</sup>               | 33 | 3.5  | 1.00              | .18                |
| Preparation for advanced work in major <sup>d</sup>            | 33 | 3.5  | 1.12              | .20                |
| Strong integration with major <sup>d</sup>                     | 33 | 3.4  | 1.14              | .20                |
| Foundational skills to be a successful student                 | 32 | 3.4  | 1.16              | .21                |

(continued)

Table 4 (continued)

| GE should provide                                | N  | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|--|----|------|----------------|-----------------|
| Strong time management skills                    | 33 | 3.4  | 1.14           | .20             |
| Strong leadership skills                         | 33 | 3.3  | 1.08           | .19             |
| A liberal arts foundation plus major preparation | 33 | 3.2  | 1.04           | .18             |
| A liberal arts foundation plus major preparation | 33 | 3.2  | 1.04           | .16             |
| Only a liberal arts focused foundation           | 33 | 2.9  | 1.13           | .20             |
| Competency in personal finance                   | 34 | 2.9  | 1.13           | .19             |

*Note.* Levels of agreement: 5=Strongly agree, 4=Agree, 3=Neither agree or disagree, 2=Disagree, 1=Strongly disagree.

L.E.A.P essential learning outcomes: <sup>a</sup>Human cultures and the physical and natural world, <sup>b</sup>Intellectual and practical skills, <sup>c</sup>Personal and social responsibility, <sup>d</sup>Integrative and applied learning.

Participants were provided the opportunity to provide comments following the purpose-oriented survey questions. The primary additional purpose of the general education curriculum derived from the participants' responses was the need for breadth outside the major. Patterns that emerged from CAS faculty-respondents' comments were the need to improve general education, the need to define general education with more clarity and consensus, and the need to define general education's relationship with the major

*CAS faculty-respondents' survey results for perceptions of value.* Table 5 displays number of CAS respondents per survey item, mean Likert-type scale scores, standard deviations, and standard error means. Participants responded to survey items that represented value of the general education curriculum. They were asked to provide a level of agreement, i.e. 5=strongly agree, 4=agree, 3=neither agree or disagree, 2=disagree, 1=strongly disagree, for each item in terms of their perceptions towards the overall value of general education. CAS faculty-

respondents had the highest mean level of agreement for value items “I care about general education” ( $M=4.4$ ,  $SD=.61$ ), followed by their belief that general education is critical for becoming a contributing citizen ( $M=4.3$ ,  $SD=.84$ ), and that general education is important for those with health care professions majors ( $M=4.2$ ,  $SD=.83$ ). On the other hand, CAS faculty-respondents had the highest mean level of disagreement with the belief that faculty in WCHP value GE more than CAS faculty ( $M=2.3$ ,  $SD=.65$ ), the belief that most purposes of GE can be met within the major ( $M=2.2$ ,  $SD=1.29$ ), and the belief that general education is an obstacle for students’ work in their major ( $M=1.6$ ,  $SD=1.11$ ).

Table 5

*Descriptive Survey Data for CAS Faculty-Respondents’ Perceptions of the Value of the General Education Curriculum in Descending Order*

| Value Item   | N  | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|--|----|------|----------------|-----------------|
| I care about general education   | 34 | 4.4  | .61            | .11             |
| I believe GE is critical for success of the students as a contributing citizen | 34 | 4.3  | .84            | .14             |
| I believe GE is critical for students pursuing a health professional major     | 33 | 4.2  | .83            | .15             |
| I believe liberal arts focused GE is necessary in higher education             | 34 | 4.0  | 1.06           | .18             |
| I believe GE is critical for overall success of the students at UNE            | 34 | 4.0  | 1.06           | .18             |

(continued)

Table 5 (continued)

| Value Item  | N  | Mean | Std.<br>Deviation | Std. Error<br>Mean |
|---|----|------|-------------------|--------------------|
| I believe GE is critical for success of the students in the workplace             | 34 | 3.9  | .61               | .11                |
| I communicate the importance of GE to my students                                 | 34 | 3.8  | .91               | .16                |
| I believe faculty in CAS value GE more than those in WCHP                         | 33 | 3.6  | .87               | .15                |
| I believe UNE values GE as an impactful and effective part of students' education | 34 | 3.4  | 1.05              | .18                |
| I believe GE is valued by most faculty members across both colleges at UNE        | 33 | 3.4  | .70               | .12                |
| I believe a strong GE program could retain students at UNE                        | 34 | 3.4  | 1.08              | .19                |
| I prefer to teach a course in my specialization over GE courses                   | 33 | 3.2  | 1.08              | .19                |
| I believe GE is valued by administrators at UNE                                   | 32 | 3.1  | 1.08              | .20                |
| I believe GE is valued by admissions at UNE                                       | 33 | 2.9  | .86               | .15                |
| I believe a strong GE program could attract students                              | 34 | 2.9  | 1.23              | .21                |
| I believe 40 credits is not necessary for overall success of students             | 33 | 2.9  | 1.12              | .19                |
| I believe GE is valued by most students at UNE                                    | 33 | 2.8  | .92               | .16                |

(continued)

Table 5 (continued)

| Value Item  | N  | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|---|----|------|----------------|-----------------|
| I believe students care about GE  | 33 | 2.7  | .98            | .17             |
| I believe 40 credits of GE is too few for overall success of the students | 33 | 2.6  | .87            | .15             |
| I believe faculty in WCHP value GE more than CAS faculty                  | 33 | 2.3  | .65            | .11             |
| I believe most purposes of GE can be met within the major                 | 33 | 2.2  | 1.29           | .22             |
| I believe GE courses are obstacles to the students' major work            | 34 | 1.6  | 1.11           | .19             |

*Note.* Levels of agreement: 5=Strongly agree, 4=Agree, 3=Neither agree or disagree, 2=Disagree, 1=Strongly disagree

Participants were given the opportunity to provide additional comments and/or explanations for the way they responded following the value-oriented survey questions.

Overall, many commented about how the general education curriculum is devalued by faculty, students, and administration. In addition, CAS faculty-respondents provided a variety of ways to improve the implementation of the general education curriculum, with most noting the need to create a connection with the major and the importance of intentional communication of the value of general education to the students.

*Thematic analysis for CAS faculty-respondents' interviews for perceptions of purpose.*

Overall, 52% (n=18) CAS faculty-respondents volunteered to participate in both, the survey and the interview. Eight individuals were randomly selected to meet one on one with the researcher for a 60 minute interview in a location of their convenience. Four of these individuals were CAS faculty members who reported that they teach a course within the general education curriculum (CASGE) and the remaining four reported that they did not teach within the general education

curriculum (CASNGE). A thematic analysis was conducted on CAS faculty-respondents' responses about their perceptions of the general education curriculum. Overall, three major themes emerged from the analysis: (a) importance of exploration of multiple areas and perspectives, (b) importance of general education outcomes and contributions to the society and/or profession, and (c) importance of establishing a foundation for the major and/or profession. Table 6 provides a summary of the themes and sub-themes that emerged.

Table 6

*Interview Thematic Analysis: CAS Faculty-Respondents' Perceptions of Purpose (n=8)*

| Theme                                    | <i>f</i> | Sub-theme                 | Key terms                         |
|--|----------|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Importance of exploration                | 8        | Broad exposure            | Well-rounded, different, multiple |
|  |          | Curiosity and examination | Curious, explore, wide, examine   |
| Importance of outcomes and contributions | 7        | Transcend utility         | Rounded, citizen, society         |
|  |          |                           | Skills, outcomes                  |
| Importance of establishing a foundation  | 6        | Practical purposes        | Preparation, major, job, basics   |

*Theme 1: Importance of exploration of multiple areas and perspectives.* All CAS faculty-respondents interviewed ( $n=8$ ) discussed that general education should provide a broad exploration to multiple areas outside the major discipline. Such exploration will allow students to become exposed to multiple perspectives on ways to communicate, solve problems, make decisions, and contribute to society. Exploration through the general education curriculum also provides the ability to become more curious and have a wider examination of different areas. The following quotes exemplified CAS faculty-respondents' perceptions in terms of the

importance of exploration: (a) “Part of the purpose is to help students realize that knowledge is vast, we don’t know everything, and to spur them to become intellectually curious, to explore realms, and to find new interests and passions beyond simply their major or chosen career profession,” (CASGE5), and 2) “...to be exposed to ideas, to allow for questioning, and an examination of things,” (CASNGE4). Both those who teach within the general education program (CASGE) and those do not (CASNGE) had similar perceptions in support of this overarching theme of the importance of exploration of multiple areas and perspectives to fulfill a purpose of the general education curriculum.

*Theme 2: Importance of general education outcomes and contributions to the society and/or profession.* Both CASGE and CASNGE (n= 7) discussed that general education should provide several outcomes to the student and contributions towards society. Most of the CAS faculty-respondents equated outcomes and contributions as “transcending utility” (CASNGE2), i.e. becoming a well-rounded life-long learner who is able to participate within a society. Practical skill development also emerged as an outcome or contribution; the importance of general education providing communication skills, critical thinking skills, math skills, and problem-solving skills. The following quotes exemplified CAS faculty-respondents’ perceptions in terms of the importance of outcomes and contributions: 1) “If you don’t have general education then you are simply training for a job. We need an educated populous to support a democratic society,” (CASGE7), and 2) “I think general education helps students diversify their skill set and that is important in terms of being a well-rounded, educated person. I also think that there is a very practical purpose-to become intellectually and skill flexible,” (CASGE5). It is noted that participant CASNGE1 reported a dichotomy within this thematic content by suggesting that “the thought that everyone needs a liberal arts education is arrogant because it

implies that those who do not [have a liberal arts education], cannot critically think or have other practical skills” (CASNGE1).

Overall, the CAS faculty-respondents interviewed perceived that the general education curriculum should fulfill both, non-utilitarian purposes and practical, skill building purposes. Those CAS faculty-respondents who teach within the general education curriculum responded more with perceptions that general education was for non-utilitarian purposes when compared to CASNGE. The CASNGE participants responded with a greater recognition of the practical purposes of the general education curriculum compared to CASGE participants.

*Theme 3: Importance of establishing a foundation for major and/or profession.* Seventy-five percent (n=6) of the CAS faculty-respondents verbalized their perception that the general education curriculum should establish a foundation. Many responded that general education should provide foundation for the students’ major area, while others suggested the foundation was for the profession, for being a successful college student, and/or for life, itself. No patterns emerged amongst or between CASGE and CASNGE. The following quotes exemplified CAS faculty-respondents’ perceptions in terms of the importance of establishing foundation: 1) “I can’t envision an area where general education would not play an important role in the student succeeding in their major discipline,” (CASNGE3), and 2) “Scientists need to solve things in a novel way and having a background in history or mathematics can help them make decisions,” (CASNGE2).

*Thematic analysis for CAS faculty-respondents’ interviews for perceptions of value.* Content analysis of CAS faculty-respondents’ responses addressing their perceptions towards the value of general education was conducted. Overall, three major themes emerged from the



analysis: (a) challenges to value, (b) importance of transcending utility, and (c) importance of utility. Table 7 provides a summary of the theme and emergent sub-themes.

Table 7

*Interview Thematic Analysis: CAS Faculty-Respondents' Perceptions of Value (n=8)*

| Theme                              | <i>f</i> | Sub-theme            | Key terms                                    |
|------------------------------------|----------|----------------------|--|
| Challenges to value                | 7        | Lack of connectivity | Major, integrate, link                       |
|                                    |          | Lack of cohesion     | Consensus, agreement, tension, we, they      |
| Importance of transcending utility | 7        |                      | Society, interesting, contribute             |
| Importance of utility              | 4        |                      | Usefulness, skills, practical, engage, solve |

*Theme 1: Challenges to the value of general education.* During interviews, 88% ( $n=7$ ) CAS faculty-respondents discussed challenges to the value of general education. They identified obstacles to students' appreciating the true value of general education including the lack of connectivity with the major and the lack of cohesion amongst faculty in terms of value placed on general education.

Faculty-respondents from CAS discussed the lack of connectivity of GE courses with the major discipline noting that a formalized integration between general education courses and major requirements would make the general education curriculum more meaningful to the student. This belief is best exemplified through the following quotes: (a) "General education helps to create transference of learning connections. It can help set their major fields into a wider context of history and knowledge. I think that is very valuable and whenever we can make those connections, we should,"(CASGE5), and 2) "Trying to make a link [with major] is

important. This may help define general education goals on a level that will help students understand its value. If it is separate, it may send the message to the student that they really do not need it,” (CASGE6). It is noted that CASGE6 provided a dichotomy within her response explaining that she was undecided about connectivity. She saw value in both connectivity and in keeping general education separate from the major; “Having students focus on a course that has nothing to do with their major as all is also valuable. I want them to explore and drink up as much of this experience [college] as possible.”

The majority of the CAS faculty-respondents also suggested that the value of general education is challenged by the lack of cohesion or consensus around its purpose. This sends a message to the students that the general education curriculum is not of value. This perception of lack of cohesion is exemplified by the following quotes: 1)

It is important to re-educate colleagues about the need to have a philosophy of education and that students are not here only for x,y,z [job training], but that they are also here to gain a broad base of knowledge. Many try to define general education with a utilitarian purpose. If you do not have a philosophy of education, then all you have a turf war.  
(CASGE7);

and 2) “I think there is a lack of agreement towards how to best shape general education, especially given the realities of today and pressures from, not only administration, but also, what I see as an anti-intellectual climate in the U.S.” (CASGE5).

Theme 2: Importance of transcending utility. Overall, during the interviews, 88% ( $n=7$ ) CAS faculty-respondents discussed that there a value of general education is its ability to transcend utility; knowing for the sake of knowing. The following quotes exemplified the value of transcending utility in creating a broad, well-rounded individual: 1) “There is nothing more

boring than sitting around with a bunch of scientists who have never read anything outside of the sciences. Students should take these classes [general education] to become an interesting individual-you do not want to be boring,” (CASGE8); 2)

General education will make them a better person and force them to look inside themselves and the greater society. There is value in that. We cannot always translate that value into dollar signs or to get a job, but these reflective skills are very important. (CASGE7);

and 3) “I also think there is a good that transcends utility and that a knowledge of these areas [provided by general education] is a good onto on to itself.” (CASNGE2).

The following quotes exemplified the value of transcending utility by creating a breadth of viewpoints: (a) “It gives students something you cannot teach, perspective. Without a breadth of viewpoints, it is hard to appreciate other views and difficult to engage in meaningful conversations because everyone would only be battling their own position,” (CASNGE4), and (b) “There is value in being able to think about things in a different way. There is value in empathy and that is why you take these [general education] classes.” (CASGE6);

*Theme 3: The importance of utility.* Fifty percent of the CAS faculty-respondents suggested the importance of utility when discussing their perception towards the value of general education. To this end, the general education curriculum is valuable due to its overall usefulness of its potential outcomes. Faculty representing both groups, CASGE and CASNGE discussed utility in their responses: (a) “Having world skills in important in a job setting. Employers like students that are well-rounded and that can think critically,” (CASGE7), and (b)) “Engagement and knowing how to engage effectively is critical. Interaction is crucial. This type of engagement cannot take place if you do not have an expansive world view,” (CASNGE4).

**Research Question 2.** How do faculty members who teach in the Westbrook College of Health Professions at the University of New England perceive the purpose and value of the general education curriculum?

**Findings for Research Question 2.** To answer the second research question, the survey and interview responses of WCHP faculty-respondents ( $n=22$ ) were examined. Of the 56 total participants, 39.3% ( $n=22$ ) were from the Westbrook College of Health Professions. Population information is summarized in Table 8. The majority of the responding faculty from WCHP were of full-time status (88.8%,  $f=18$ ), non-tenured (90.9%,  $f=22$ ), and most have been teaching at UNE for one to three years (31.8%,  $f=7$ ). None of the WCHP faculty-respondents teach within the general education curriculum and the majority have some knowledge of the general education curriculum (72.7%,  $f=16$ ).

Table 8

*WCHP Faculty-Respondents' Population Information Summary ( $n=22$ )*

|                   | <i>f</i> | %    |
|-------------------|----------|------|
| Employment        |          |      |
| Full-time         | 18       | 88.8 |
| Part-time         | 1        | 4.5  |
| Adjunct           | 3        | 13.6 |
| Status            |          |      |
| Tenured           | 2        | 9.1  |
| Non-tenured       | 20       | 90.9 |
| # of years at UNE |          |      |
| First year        | 1        | 4.6  |
| 1-3 years         | 7        | 31.8 |
| 4-6 years         | 3        | 13.6 |
| 7-9 years         | 5        | 22.7 |
| >10 years         | 6        | 27.3 |

(continued)

Table 8

|                                   | <i>f</i> | %     |
|-----------------------------------|----------|-------|
| GE affiliation                    |          |       |
| Does not teach GE courses         | 22       | 100.0 |
| Teaching in GE courses            | 0        | 0     |
| Knowledge of GE curriculum at UNE |          |       |
| No knowledge                      | 3        | 1.4   |
| Some knowledge                    | 16       | 72.7  |
| High degree of knowledge          | 3        | 13.6  |

*Note.* UNE=University of New England; GE= General education.

*WCHP faculty-respondents' survey results for perceptions towards purpose.* Table 9 displays number of WCHP respondents per survey item, mean Likert-type scale scores, standard deviations, and standard error means. Participants responded to survey items that represented potential purposes of the general education curriculum. They were asked to provide a level of agreement, i.e. 5=strongly agree, 4=agree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 2=disagree, 1=strongly disagree, for each item in terms of their perceptions towards what general education should provide the student. The WCHP faculty-respondents had the highest mean level of agreement in relation to their perception that general education should provide competency in written communication ( $M = 4.9$ ,  $SD = .35$ ), competency in verbal communication ( $M = 4.9$ ,  $SD = .35$ ), competency in critical thinking and problem-solving skills ( $M = 4.8$ ,  $SD = .43$ ), and a sense of values, principles, and ethics ( $M=4.8$ ,  $SD =.09$ ). On the other hand, WCHP faculty-respondents only disagreement was with the purpose that general education should provide only a liberal arts focused education ( $M = 1.9$ ,  $SD=.20$ ).

Table 9

*Descriptive Survey Data for WCHP Faculty-Respondents' Perceptions of the Purpose of General Education in Descending Order*

| GE should provide   | N  | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|---|----|------|----------------|-----------------|
| Competency in written communication <sup>b</sup>                            | 22 | 4.9  | .35            | .08             |
| Competency in verbal communication <sup>b</sup>                             | 22 | 4.9  | .35            | .08             |
| Competency in critical thinking and problem solving skills <sup>b</sup>     | 22 | 4.8  | .43            | .09             |
| A sense of values, principles, and ethics <sup>c</sup>                      | 22 | 4.8  | .43            | .09             |
| A well-rounded education  | 21 | 4.6  | .59            | .13             |
| An understanding of professionalism   | 22 | 4.6  | .50            | .11             |
| An understanding of personal health <sup>c</sup>                            | 21 | 4.6  | .60            | .13             |
| An interdisciplinary perspective <sup>d</sup>                               | 22 | 4.5  | .60            | .13             |
| The ability to use evidence-based practice to inform decisions <sup>b</sup> | 22 | 4.4  | .73            | .16             |
| A broader view of the world   | 21 | 4.4  | .75            | .16             |
| Strong leadership skills  | 22 | 4.4  | .67            | .14             |
| Strong team building skills <sup>b</sup>                                    | 22 | 4.4  | .67            | .14             |
| An understanding of public health <sup>c</sup>                              | 22 | 4.4  | .73            | .16             |
| Foundational skills to be a successful student <sup>d</sup>                 | 22 | 4.3  | .83            | .18             |

(continued)

Table 9 (continued)

| GE should provide   | N  | Mean | Std.<br>Deviation | Std. Error<br>Mean |
|---|----|------|-------------------|--------------------|
| Strong time management skills                                     | 22 | 4.3  | .63               | .14                |
| An understanding of self and human behavior <sup>c</sup>          | 22 | 4.3  | .70               | .15                |
| Competency in quantitative reasoning <sup>b</sup>                 | 19 | 4.3  | .56               | .13                |
| Competency in computer skills <sup>b</sup>                        | 22 | 4.2  | .69               | .15                |
| An understanding of current social and civic issues <sup>c</sup>  | 22 | 4.2  | .53               | .11                |
| Preparation for advanced work in major <sup>d</sup>               | 21 | 4.1  | .66               | .14                |
| Preparation for workplace success                                 | 22 | 4.1  | .83               | .18                |
| An understanding of being involved in a community <sup>c</sup>    | 22 | 4.1  | .83               | .18                |
| An understanding of environmental sustainability <sup>c</sup>     | 22 | 4.1  | .77               | .17                |
| An understanding of diversity <sup>c</sup>                        | 22 | 3.9  | .81               | .17                |
| An expanded knowledge of cultures outside of America <sup>a</sup> | 22 | 3.7  | .84               | .18                |
| An expanded knowledge of American culture <sup>a</sup>            | 22 | 3.6  | .79               | .17                |
| Competency in personal finance                                    | 22 | 3.6  | .96               | .21                |
| An experience in the creative arts <sup>a</sup>                   | 22 | 3.6  | .73               | .16                |
| A liberal arts foundation plus major preparation                  | 21 | 3.5  | .75               | .16                |

(continued)

Table 9 (continued)

| GE should provide                         | N  | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|---|----|------|----------------|-----------------|
| An experience with languages <sup>a</sup> | 22 | 3.5  | .60            | .13             |
| Only a liberal arts focused foundation    | 22 | 1.9  | .75            | .16             |

*Note.* Levels of agreement: 5=Strongly agree, 4= Agree, 3= Neither agree or disagree, 2= Disagree, 1= Strongly disagree.

L.E.A.P essential learning outcomes: <sup>a</sup>Human cultures and the physical and natural world, <sup>b</sup>Intellectual and practical skills, <sup>c</sup>Personal and social responsibility, <sup>d</sup>Integrative and applied learning.

WCHP faculty-respondents were provided the opportunity to provide comments following the purpose-oriented survey questions. Only one WCHP faculty-respondent responded and suggested that general education needs to provide a “broad-based understanding of various topics.”

*WCHP faculty-respondents’ survey results for perceptions towards value.* Table 10 displays number of WCHP respondents per survey item, mean Likert-type scale scores, standard deviations, and standard error means. Participants responded to survey items that represented value of general education. They were asked to provide a level of agreement, i.e. 5 = strongly agree, 4 = agree, 3= neither agree nor disagree, 2 = disagree, and 1= strongly disagree, for each item in terms of their perceptions towards the overall value of the general education curriculum. The WCHP faculty-respondents had the highest mean level of agreement for the preference for teaching a course within their specialization over a general education course ( $M = 4.4$ ,  $SD = .79$ ), caring about general education ( $M = 4.3$ ,  $SD = .57$ ), and for their belief that general education is critical for the student becoming a contributing citizen ( $M = 4.3$ ,  $SD = .55$ ). WCHP faculty-respondents’ lowest means indicated a disagreement with the belief that faculty in WCHP value general education more than those in CAS ( $M = 2.3$ ,  $SD = .77$ ) and the belief that 40 credits of general education is too few for the overall success of the students ( $M = 2.3$ ,  $SD = .64$ ).



Table 10

*Descriptive Survey Data for WCHP Faculty-Respondents' Perceptions of the Value of General Education in Descending Order*

| Value Item  | N  | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|---|----|------|----------------|-----------------|
| I prefer to teach a course in my specialization over GE courses               | 22 | 4.4  | .79            | .17             |
| I care about GE   | 22 | 4.3  | .57            | .12             |
| I believe GE is critical for success of the student as a contributing citizen | 22 | 4.3  | .55            | .12             |
| I believe GE is critical for success of the students in the workplace         | 21 | 4.2  | .54            | .12             |
| I believe GE is critical for students pursuing a health professional major    | 22 | 4.1  | .68            | .15             |
| I believe GE is critical overall success of the students at UNE               | 22 | 4.0  | .65            | .14             |
| I believe UNE values GE as an impactful and effective part of students at UNE | 22 | 4.0  | .44            | .09             |
| I believe a strong GE program could retain students                           | 21 | 3.7  | .78            | .17             |
| I believe GE is valued by most administrators at UNE                          | 22 | 3.7  | .65            | .14             |
| I believe GE is values by admissions at UNE                                   | 22 | 3.6  | .67            | .14             |
| I believe faculty in CAS value GE more than those in WCHP                     | 22 | 3.6  | .96            | .20             |

(continued)

Table 10 (continued)

| Value Item   | N  | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|--|----|------|----------------|-----------------|
| I believe a strong GE program could attract students to UNE                | 22 | 3.5  | .80            | .17             |
| I communicate the importance of GE to my students                          | 22 | 3.4  | .80            | .17             |
| I believe a liberal arts focused GE is necessary in higher education       | 22 | 3.4  | .85            | .18             |
| I believe 40 credits of GE is not necessary for overall student success    | 22 | 3.0  | 1.07           | .23             |
| I believe GE is valued by most faculty members across both Colleges at UNE | 22 | 3.0  | .76            | .16             |
| I believe most purposes of GE can be met within the major                  | 22 | 2.7  | .94            | .20             |
| I believe GE is valued by most students at UNE                             | 22 | 2.6  | .79            | .17             |
| I believe students care about the their GE courses                         | 22 | 2.6  | .91            | .19             |
| I believe GE courses are obstacles to the students' major work             | 22 | 2.5  | .86            | .18             |
| I believe faculty in WCHP value GE more than those in CAS                  | 22 | 2.3  | .96            | .20             |
| I believe 40 credits of GE is too few for overall success of students      | 21 | 2.3  | .64            | .14             |

*Note.* Levels of agreement: 5=Strongly agree, 4= Agree, 3= Neither agree or disagree, 2= Disagree, 1= Strongly disagree.

Participants from WCHP were given the opportunity to provide additional comments and/or explanations for the way they responded following the value-oriented survey questions.

Some patterns that emerged from the WCHP faculty-respondents' responses as they relate to value of the general education curriculum were: (a) general education is perceived as being devalued by students, (b) there should be less or, at least more effectively designed general education which incorporates or connects with the health care professions, and (c) communication of the value of general education is important to understand and appreciate its value.

*Thematic analysis for WCHP faculty-respondents' interviews for perceptions towards purpose.* Overall, 36% ( $n=8$ ) WCHP faculty-respondents volunteered to participate in both the survey and the interview. Four individuals were randomly selected to meet one on one with the researcher for a 60 minute interview in a location of their convenience. None of these individuals reported that they taught within the general education curriculum.

Content analysis of WCHP faculty-respondents' responses addressing their perceptions towards the purpose of the general education curriculum was conducted. Overall, two major themes emerged from the analysis: (a) importance of exploration of multiple areas and perspectives, and (b) importance of establishing a foundation. Table 11 provides a summary of emerging themes and sub-themes.

Table 11

*Interview Thematic Analysis: WCHP Faculty-Respondents' Perceptions of Purpose ( $n=4$ )*

| Theme                                   | <i>f</i> | Sub-theme                       | Key terms                               |
|---|----------|---------------------------------|---|
| Importance of exploration               | 4        | Broad exposure                  | Well-rounded, different, across         |
|   |          | Balanced with major             | Major, discipline, balance              |
| Importance of establishing a foundation | 3        | Foundation for profession/major | Preparation, major, job, basics, skills |

*Theme 1: Importance of exploration of multiple areas and perspectives.* All four of the WCHP faculty-respondents interviewed discussed the importance of exploration as a purpose of general education. WCHPP1 mentioned that “[General education] should provide students with a broad variety of knowledge across different disciplines.” WCHPP4 described the purpose of general education as “...broadens their perspective on themselves and the world. Without it they do not have empathy or perspective to understand how others think what they think.” Though all WCHP faculty-respondents discussed the importance of exploration, two of the participants also suggested that there should be good balance between the major requirements and this ability to explore: (a) “Student success is degree completion, gaining knowledge, skills, and abilities to go to work or graduate school, and personal fulfillment. To be successful in all three areas, there has to be balance between general education and major requirements,” (WCHPP3), and (b) “...is necessary so they [students] can think outside their field of study, though there should be a happy medium when it comes to these [general education] requirements.” (WCHPP2)

*Theme 2: Importance of establishing foundation for major and/or profession.* Three of the four WCHP faculty-respondents discussed the importance of establishing a foundation as an important purpose of the general education curriculum. Seventy-five percent of WCHP faculty-respondents perceived that general education should provide a foundation for the profession, whereas 50% suggested that it should provide a foundation for the major. One participant overlapped both sub-themes. The following quotes exemplified WCHP faculty-respondents’ perceptions in terms of the importance of foundation for the profession and major: (a) “As we train students to be competitive for jobs, we must clarify how poetry will help the student do this” (WCHPP2), (b) “...assist in the development of the student for their career and life,” (WCHPP3), and (c) “...should provide background knowledge that they need to succeed in their

major.” (WCHPP1). As previously mentioned, one participant’s response overlapped both profession and the major; “...learn foundational concepts that are necessary for success in their major but also gives them exposure and a maturity of thought that is needed to be a successful healthcare provider,” (WCHPP4).

*Thematic analysis for WCHP faculty-respondents’ interviews for perceptions towards purpose.* Content analysis of WCHP faculty-respondents’ responses ( $n=4$ ) addressing their perceptions towards the value of general education was conducted. Overall, one primary theme emerged; WCHP perceived that there were challenges to the value of general education (Table 12).

Table 12

*Interview Thematic Analysis: WCHP Faculty-Respondents’ Perceptions of Value ( $n=4$ )*

| Theme               | <i>f</i> | Sub-theme               | Key terms                   |
|---------------------|----------|-------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Challenges to value | 4        | Questionable usefulness | Meaning, wasteful, obstacle |
|                     |          | Lack of connectivity    | Integrate, link, connection |
|                     |          | Shifting goals          | Cost, job, outcomes         |

*Theme 1: Challenge to value.* All four WCHP faculty respondents discussed challenges to establishing the value of general education. Participants suggested that communicating the usefulness of general education, its lack of connectivity to the major, and the shifting goals of higher education all threaten the perceived value of general education. There was some overlap amongst faculty across the sub-themes.

Three participants suggested that the usefulness of general education is a challenge to the value of general education. The following quotes exemplify this subtheme: (a) “...must be put

together in a meaningful way, more useful, and not serve as a barrier to the student,” (WCHP1), and (b) “Students don’t see the relevance in these courses. They should be applicable, practical and provide something that can use,” (WCHP3). Three participants suggested that the lack of connectivity is a challenge to the value of the general education curriculum:

Faculty should be more educated about other majors. If general education faculty knew more about our major they could make more references to specific disciplines in class.

They could plant the seeds and we, in the major, could refer back to those classes; it takes more collaboration. (WCHP4)

Three WCHP participants noted that the shift in the overall goal of higher education is contributing to the challenge of finding value in the general education curriculum. This is best exemplified in the following quotes: (a) “Due to the expense of a college education, there is a need to ensure that the undergraduate degree prepares a student to go into work or graduate/professional school right away,” (WCHP3), and (b) “Due to the cost of education, the first questions parents and students want to know is what they can do with the degree in the current job market. Students are going to college to get a job,” (WCHP2).

**Research Question 3.** \_Are there differences in the perceptions of the purpose and value of the general education curriculum between faculty members who teach in CAS and WCHP at the University of New England?

**Findings for Research Question 3.** Independent t-tests were used to analyze the Likert-type survey data and compared the perceptions towards the purpose and value of the general education curriculum in faculty-respondents from the College of Arts and Sciences and the Westbrook College of Health Professions. The null hypothesis (H0) was that there were no

differences between the Colleges in regard to purpose and/or value. The level of significance was set at the .05 level.

*Perceptions towards the purpose of general education compared.* Independent t-tests were conducted to compare the mean responses of CAS and WCHP faculty- respondents' level of agreement (5= strongly agree; 4= agree; 3= neither agree nor disagree; 2= disagree; 1= strongly disagree) towards items focused on the purpose of the general education curriculum. The results are found in Table 13. Significant differences ( $p < .05$ ) were found in the perceptions towards purpose between CAS and WCHP faculty-respondents. Respondents from CAS agreed significantly more that general education should provide students with a broader view of the world ( $p = .023$ ), an understanding of current social and civic issues ( $p = .048$ ), an expanded knowledge of American culture and history ( $p = .024$ ), and an expanded knowledge of cultures and societies outside of America ( $p = .009$ ) when compared to WCHP faculty-respondents. In addition there was a trend for more CAS faculty-respondents to agree that general education should provide an understanding of diversity in terms of race, gender, class, and culture ( $p = .059$ ).

The respondents from WCHP agreed significantly more than their CAS counterparts with the statement that the general education curriculum should provide preparation for advanced work in major ( $p = .024$ ), competency in written communication ( $p = .015$ ), verbal communication ( $p = .017$ ), and computer skills ( $p = .005$ ). WCHP also agreed more that general education should provide a sense of values, principles, and ethics ( $p = .007$ ), an understanding of personal health ( $p = .007$ ), an understanding of public health ( $p = .001$ ), strong work habits ( $p = .001$ ),

Table 13

*Results of t-test and Descriptive Statistics for Perceptions of Purpose by College*

| GE should provide                     | College |     |    |      |     |    | 95% CI    |         | T  | df |
|---------------------------------------|---------|-----|----|------|-----|----|-----------|---------|----|----|
|                                       | CAS     |     |    | WCHP |     |    | LL,UL     |         |    |    |
|                                       | M       | SD  | n  | M    | SD  | n  |           |         |    |    |
| Broader view of world                 | 4.8     | .41 | 34 | 4.4  | .75 | 21 | -.68,-.05 | -2.35*  | 53 |    |
| Well-rounded education                | 4.6     | .75 | 34 | 4.6  | .59 | 21 | -.33, .45 | .31     | 53 |    |
| American culture <sup>a</sup>         | 4.1     | .74 | 33 | 3.6  | .79 | 22 | -.90,.07  | -2.32*  | 53 |    |
| Cultures outside America <sup>a</sup> | 4.3     | .76 | 33 | 3.7  | .84 | 22 | -1.03,.15 | -2.71*  | 53 |    |
| Creative arts <sup>a</sup>            | 4.0     | .92 | 34 | 3.6  | .73 | 22 | -.88,.06  | -1.75   | 54 |    |
| Experience languages <sup>a</sup>     | 3.8     | .90 | 34 | 3.5  | .60 | 22 | -.76,.12  | -1.48   | 54 |    |
| Self and human behavior <sup>a</sup>  | 3.9     | .70 | 33 | 4.3  | .70 | 22 | -.06,.72  | 1.72    | 53 |    |
| Verbal communication <sup>b</sup>     | 4.6     | .50 | 34 | 4.9  | .35 | 22 | .06,.55   | 2.47*   | 54 |    |
| Computer skills <sup>b</sup>          | 3.6     | .93 | 34 | 4.2  | .69 | 22 | .21,1.13  | 2.90**  | 54 |    |
| Quantitative reasoning <sup>b</sup>   | 4.2     | .72 | 34 | 4.3  | .56 | 19 | -.30,.47  | .45     | 51 |    |
| Critical thinking <sup>b</sup>        | 4.6     | .56 | 34 | 4.8  | .43 | 22 | -.07, .50 | 1.52    | 54 |    |
| Team building skills <sup>b</sup>     | 3.5     | .88 | 32 | 4.4  | .67 | 22 | .46,1.35  | 4.10*** | 52 |    |
| Diversity <sup>c</sup>                | 4.3     | .77 | 34 | 3.9  | .81 | 22 | -.85,.02  | -1.93   | 54 |    |

(continued)



Table 13 (continued)

| GE should provide                          | College |      |    |      |     |    | 95% CI   |                     |    |
|--|---------|------|----|------|-----|----|----------|---------------------|----|
|  | CAS     |      |    | WCHP |     |    | LL,UL    |                     |    |
|  | M       | SD   | N  | M    | SD  | n  |          | T                   | df |
| Values, principles, ethics <sup>c</sup>    | 4.3     | .72  | 34 | 4.8  | .43 | 22 | -.14,.82 | 2.81 <sup>*</sup>   | 54 |
| Environmental sustainability <sup>c</sup>  | 4.1     | .70  | 34 | 4.1  | .77 | 22 | -.33,.48 | .38                 | 53 |
| Understanding community <sup>c</sup>       | 4.1     | .77  | 33 | 4.1  | .83 | 22 | -.39,.48 | .21                 | 53 |
| Evidence based practice <sup>c</sup>       | 4.2     | .74  | 34 | 4.4  | .73 | 22 | -.23,.58 | .86                 | 54 |
| Foundational skills <sup>d</sup>           | 3.4     | 1.16 | 32 | 4.3  | .83 | 22 | .26,1.41 | 2.90 <sup>*</sup>   | 52 |
| Interdisciplinary perspective <sup>d</sup> | 3.9     | 1.01 | 33 | 4.5  | .60 | 22 | .11,1.07 | 2.46 <sup>*</sup>   | 53 |
| Integration with major <sup>d</sup>        | 3.4     | 1.14 | 33 | 4.5  | .74 | 22 | .51,1.61 | 3.84 <sup>***</sup> | 53 |
| Personal health                            | 3.5     | 1.00 | 33 | 4.6  | .60 | 21 | .60,1.57 | 4.47 <sup>***</sup> | 52 |
| Public health                              | 3.5     | .97  | 33 | 4.4  | .73 | 22 | .36,1.34 | 3.49 <sup>**</sup>  | 53 |
| Strong work habits                         | 3.6     | 1.15 | 33 | 4.5  | .67 | 22 | .38,1.47 | 3.40 <sup>**</sup>  | 53 |
| Time management                            | 3.4     | 1.14 | 33 | 4.3  | .63 | 22 | .34,1.42 | 3.28 <sup>**</sup>  | 53 |
| Leadership skills                          | 3.3     | 1.08 | 33 | 4.4  | .67 | 22 | .59,1.62 | 4.30 <sup>***</sup> | 53 |

(continued)

Table 13 (continued)

| GE should provide                   | College |      |    |      |     |    | 95% CI     |          |    |
|-------------------------------------|---------|------|----|------|-----|----|------------|----------|----|
|                                     | CAS     |      |    | WCHP |     |    | LL,UL      |          |    |
|                                     | M       | SD   | n  | M    | SD  | n  |            | T        | Df |
| Preparation for the workplace       | 3.7     | 1.00 | 33 | 4.1  | .83 | 22 | -.04,.98   | 1.83     | 53 |
| Only liberal arts focused           | 2.9     | 1.13 | 33 | 1.9  | .94 | 22 | -1.63,-.46 | -3.59*** | 53 |
| Liberal arts plus major preparation | 3.2     | 1.04 | 33 | 3.5  | .75 | 21 | -.23,.82   | 1.12     | 52 |
| Understanding professionalism       | 3.6     | .90  | 33 | 4.6  | .50 | 22 | .56,1.41   | 4.66***  | 53 |

*Note.* CI= confidence interval; LL= lower limit; UL= upper limit.

Levels of agreement: 5=Strongly agree, 4= Agree, 3= Neither agree or disagree, 2= Disagree, 1= Strongly disagree.

L.E.A.P essential learning outcomes: <sup>a</sup>Human cultures and the physical and natural world. <sup>b</sup>Intellectual and practical skills. <sup>c</sup>Personal and social responsibility. <sup>d</sup>Integrative and applied learning.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$

strong time management skills, ( $p=.005$ ), strong leadership skills ( $p<.001$ ), strong team building skills ( $p<.001$ ), foundational skills necessary to be a successful student ( $p=.005$ ), an understanding of professionalism ( $p<.001$ ), an understanding of issues through an interdisciplinary/inter-professional perspective ( $p=.017$ ), and a strong connection and integration with the major discipline area ( $p<.001$ ) when compared to CAS faculty-respondents' responses. The independent t-tests which compared purpose-oriented items also revealed that CAS and WCHP faculty-respondents significantly differed when a competency in personal finance was suggested; WCHP faculty-respondents did not agree or disagree with this statement, whereas CAS faculty-respondents had a level of disagreement ( $p=.022$ ). Faculty-respondents from both

Colleges disagreed that general education should only have a liberal arts focus, though WCHP faculty-respondents disagreed significantly more ( $p=.001$ ).

*Perceptions of the value of general education compared.* Independent t-tests were conducted to compare the mean responses of CAS and WCHP faculty-respondents' level of agreement (5= strongly agree; 4= agree; 3= neither agree nor disagree; 2= disagree; 1= strongly disagree) towards items focused on the value of general education. The results of the independent t-tests for faculty members' perceptions towards value are found in Table 14. Significant differences ( $p<.05$ ) were found in the perceptions of value between CAS and WCHP faculty-respondents. Faculty-respondents from CAS believed that a liberal arts focused general education is necessary in higher education significantly more so than WCHP faculty-respondents ( $p=.025$ ). Conversely, WCHP faculty-respondents preferred to teach a course in their specialization over general education courses when compared to CAS faculty-respondents ( $p<.001$ ). Faculty-respondents from WCHP also believed that UNE values general education as an impactful and effective part of students' education more than CAS faculty-respondents ( $p=.022$ ). In terms of how both College faculty-respondents perceived administration's value of general education, both neither agreed or disagreed, though there was significant difference in the mean level ( $p=.019$ ).

Table 14

*Results of t-tests and Descriptive Statistics for Perceptions of Value by College*

| Value item  | College |      |    |      |      |    | 95% CI     |         | t  | df |
|---|---------|------|----|------|------|----|------------|---------|----|----|
|   | CAS     |      |    | WCHP |      |    | LL,UL      |         |    |    |
|   | M       | SD   | n  | M    | SD   | n  |            |         |    |    |
| I care about GE                                   | 4.4     | .61  | 34 | 4.3  | .57  | 22 | -.45,.20   | -.76    | 54 |    |
| Critical for success as contributing citizen      | 4.3     | .84  | 34 | 4.3  | .55  | 22 | -.43,.38   | -.11    | 54 |    |
| Critical for workplace success                    | 3.9     | 1.01 | 34 | 4.2  | .54  | 21 | -.12,.84   | 1.49    | 53 |    |
| I communicate the value of GE                     | 3.8     | .91  | 34 | 3.4  | .80  | 22 | -.86,.09   | -1.62   | 54 |    |
| 40 credits is too few                             | 2.6     | .87  | 33 | 2.3  | .64  | 21 | -.70,.18   | -1.18   | 52 |    |
| 40 credits are not necessary                      | 2.9     | 1.12 | 33 | 3.0  | 1.07 | 22 | -.55,.66   | .20     | 53 |    |
| Liberal arts are necessary for success of student | 4.0     | 1.06 | 34 | 3.4  | .85  | 22 | -1.16,-.08 | -2.30*  | 54 |    |
| Prefer teaching specialization                    | 3.2     | 1.08 | 33 | 4.4  | .79  | 22 | .61,.79    | 4.28*** | 53 |    |
| GE courses are obstacles to major                 | 1.9     | 1.05 | 34 | 2.5  | .86  | 22 | .04,1.16   | 2.17*   | 54 |    |

(continued)

Table 14 (continued)

| Value item                            | College |      |    |      |     |    | 95% CI    |        | t  | Df |
|---------------------------------------|---------|------|----|------|-----|----|-----------|--------|----|----|
|                                       | CAS     |      |    | WCHP |     |    | LL,UL     |        |    |    |
|                                       | M       | SD   | n  | M    | SD  | n  |           |        |    |    |
| UNE values GE                         | 3.4     | 1.05 | 34 | 4.0  | .44 | 22 | .08,1.03  | 2.36*  | 54 |    |
| GE is necessary for health profession | 4.2     | .83  | 33 | 4.1  | .68 | 22 | -.49,.37  | -.28   | 53 |    |
| GE is valued by students              | 2.8     | .92  | 33 | 2.6  | .79 | 22 | -.66,.30  | -.76   | 53 |    |
| GE is valued by most faculty          | 3.4     | .70  | 33 | 3.0  | .76 | 22 | -.76,.04  | -1.83  | 53 |    |
| CAS values GE more than WCHP          | 3.6     | .87  | 33 | 3.6  | .96 | 22 | -.46,.55  | .18    | 53 |    |
| WCHP values GE more than CAS          | 2.3     | .65  | 33 | 2.3  | .77 | 22 | -.45,.32  | -.32   | 53 |    |
| GE is valued by administrators        | 3.1     | 1.08 | 32 | 3.7  | .65 | 22 | -.10,1.13 | 2.41*  | 52 |    |
| GE is valued by admissions            | 2.9     | .86  | 33 | 3.6  | .67 | 22 | .22,1.09  | 2.99** | 53 |    |
| Strong GE can attract students        | 2.9     | 1.23 | 34 | 3.5  | .80 | 22 | -.04,1.15 | 1.89   | 54 |    |
| Strong GE can retain students         | 3.4     | 1.08 | 34 | 3.7  | .78 | 21 | -.24,.85  | 1.12   | 53 |    |
| GE is critical for overall success    | 4.0     | 1.06 | 34 | 4.0  | .65 | 22 | -.58,.43  | -.30   | 54 |    |

Note. CI= confidence interval; LL= lower limit; UL= upper limit.

Levels of agreement: 5=Strongly agree, 4= Agree, 3= Neither agree or disagree, 2= Disagree, 1= Strongly disagree.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$

The independent t-tests which compared value-oriented items, also revealed that faculty-respondents from both Colleges disagreed with the belief that general education course are obstacles to the students' major work, though CAS faculty-respondents disagreed significantly more than their WCHP counterparts ( $p=.035$ ). In addition, faculty-respondents also differed significantly with the belief that admissions value general education; WCHP faculty-respondents neither agreed nor disagreed compared to CAS faculty-respondents, who had a level of disagreement with this belief ( $p=.004$ ).

*Thematic analysis comparison for perceptions of purpose.* Eight CAS faculty-respondents and four WCHP faculty-respondents were interviewed and a content analysis was conducted to identify common themes within and between the Colleges. Themes from each College were previously discussed with Research Question 1 and Research Question 2. These interviews also revealed thematic differences between the Colleges:

1. Faculty-respondents from both Colleges discussed the importance of exploration of multiple areas and perspectives. However, the sub-themes that emerged varied between the Colleges. Only CAS faculty-respondents emphasized that general education should enable students to become curious with their learning and enable an examination of topics students, themselves, may not initially know is even an area of interest. Only WCHP faculty-respondents noted that there should be a balance between exploration of multiple areas and the requirements for the major.
2. An additional theme was presented in the interviews with CAS faculty when compared to WCHP. CAS faculty-respondents perceived that a purpose of the general education curriculum is to satisfy certain intellectual outcomes in order to

make valuable contributions to society. WCHP faculty-respondents supported intellectual skills as foundational aspects for the major or profession.

*Thematic analysis comparison for perceptions of value.* Eight CAS faculty-respondents and four WCHP faculty-respondents were interviewed. A content analysis was conducted to identify common themes within and between the Colleges. Themes from each College were previously discussed with Research Question 1 and Research Question 2. These interviews also revealed thematic differences and similarities between the Colleges:

- 1) Faculty-respondents from both Colleges suggested that there are challenges to the value of the general education curriculum. However, the sub-themes that emerged varied between the Colleges. Only CAS faculty-respondents perceived the challenges to value as having a lack of overall cohesion over what general education should look like. Only WCHP faculty-respondents spoke more about the perceived questionable usefulness of general education as a challenge to its value. The majority of WCHP faculty-respondents also suggested that there is a shift in the goals of higher education towards a more career oriented focus. This was only mentioned by a minority of the CAS faculty-respondents.
- 2) The value of general education to transcend utility purposes was a theme that only emerged from the CAS interview responses

## Summary of Findings

Chapter 4 presented data from the survey and interviews. The results of the data analysis were used to answer the three research questions:

1. How do faculty who teach in the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of New England perceive the purpose and value of the general education curriculum?
2. How do faculty who teach in the Westbrook College of Health Professions and the University of New England perceive the purpose and value of the general education curriculum?
3. Are there differences in the perceptions of the purpose and value of the general education curriculum between faculty members who teach in the College of Arts and Sciences and the Westbrook College of Health Professions at the University of New England?

The following are the findings of the study:

1. A majority of CAS faculty-respondents indicated that general education provides students with a breadth of knowledge which help inform their role as citizens.
2. A majority of WCHP faculty-respondents indicated that general education provides students with intellectual and practical skills which help inform their role as citizens.
3. When comparing the two Colleges, despite similar values placed on the general education curriculum, there were significant differences in the perceived purpose of general education; CAS was more liberal-arts focused while WCHP perceived a more utilitarian-focused purpose.

In summary, Chapter 4 displayed the data collected for the study. As reported, there are several significant differences between the faculty-respondents from the College of Arts and



Sciences and the Westbrook College of Health Professions, as indicated by survey and interview data. Chapter 5 will discuss the findings and provide implications for the conclusions as well as recommendations for further research.

## CHAPTER 5

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to describe and compare the perceptions of College of Arts and Sciences (CAS) and Westbrook College of Health Professions (WHCP) faculty members regarding the purpose and value of the general education curriculum at the University of New England. The investigation set out to answer three research questions:

1. How do faculty members who teach in the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of New England perceive the purpose and value of the general education curriculum?
2. How do faculty members who teach in the Westbrook College of Health Professions at the University of New England perceive the purpose and value of the general education curriculum?
3. Are there differences in the perceptions of the purpose and value of the general education curriculum between faculty members who teach in the College of Arts and Sciences and the Westbrook College of Health Professions at the University of New England?

#### **Overall Summary**

The purpose of this mixed-methods research study was to describe and compare the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS) and Westbrook College of Health Professions (WHCP) faculty perceptions towards the purpose and value of the general education curriculum at the University of New England. Three research questions were addressed. A current literature review assisted in providing the focus for the research design and methodology used in the study. All undergraduate faculty members from the College of Arts and Sciences and the Westbrook College of Health Professions at the University of New England were asked to participate in this

study. The Faculty Perceptions of General Education Survey and the qualitative interviews were used to investigate the three research questions. Of the 191 undergraduate faculty members invited to participate in the study, 56 completed the survey for an overall return rate of 29.3%. Of these 56 respondents, 34 were from CAS (60.7%), and 22 were from WCHP (39.3%). Twelve faculty members, eight from CAS and four from WCHP were randomly selected to also participate in the qualitative interview process.

Faculty responses to the Likert-type survey were analyzed to determine the mean level of agreement on purpose and value statements. Independent t-tests were used to compare the mean responses of CAS and WCHP faculty for differences in perceptions of purpose and value of general education. A content analysis was conducted on the responses from the qualitative interviews and emergent themes were identified.

**Research Question 1.** Research Question 1 sought to identify the perceptions of CAS faculty-respondents towards the purpose and value of the general education curriculum at the University of New England. The survey data revealed that a majority of CAS faculty-respondents reported their most agreed upon perception of general education is that it should provide a broadened view of the world. A secondary purpose of general education, according to the CAS faculty-respondents, is to provide a well-rounded education that addresses several intellectual skills (critical thinking, problem-solving, verbal communications, etc.). Most of the respondents from CAS found value in the general education curriculum as exemplified by their perception that they care about general education and agree that the general education curriculum is critical for the success of a student as a contributing citizen. Overall, CAS faculty-respondents also perceived the importance of many of the liberal arts-focused areas; human cultures, intellectual competencies, and social awareness. These findings corroborated with interview

data which revealed that a majority of faculty-respondents discussed the importance of an exploration of multiple areas outside the major, the importance of learning outcomes that contribute to public good, and the importance of establishing competencies which provide a foundation for in-major work and/or in a profession. Those interviewed believed that much of the value of general education is found within its ability to transcend utility by preparing a student to become an “interesting” (CASGE4) and “an active participant in the greater society and not just a consumer in a capitalistic economy.” (CASGE7)

Both quantitative and qualitative strands revealed that the majority of faculty-respondents from CAS appeared to perceive that the purpose of the general education curriculum is to provide students with a breadth of knowledge and it is valued for supporting students in their role as contributing citizens in a democratic society.

**Research Question 2.** Research Question 2 sought to identify the perceptions of WCHP faculty-respondents towards the purpose and value of the general education curriculum at the University of New England. The survey data revealed that a majority of WCHP faculty-respondents reported their primary agreed upon perception of the general education curriculum is that should provide competency in written and verbal communication. A secondary purpose of the general education curriculum, according to WCHP respondents, is to provide several intellectual competencies, i.e., critical thinking and problem solving, while instilling a sense of values, principles and ethics. Overall, WCHP respondents also perceived an importance in many non-traditional, utilitarian-focused areas, e.g. an understanding of professionalism, strong work habits, leadership skills, time management, and team building skills, etc. Though most WCHP faculty-respondents agreed that they preferred to teach in their specialization over general education courses, they also indicated that they care about general education. They perceived

that the general education curriculum is critical, not only for success of the students as a contributing citizen, but also for success in the workplace. These findings corroborated with interview data which revealed that a majority of those interviewed discussed the importance of general education in providing an exploration of multiple areas outside the major, while also providing a foundation for the major and/or profession. In terms of value, most WCHP faculty-respondents discussed that general education may be devalued if it does not incorporate usefulness (for major or profession) and if it is not integrated or connected with the student's major.

Both quantitative and qualitative strands of data revealed that the majority of WCHP faculty-respondents perceived that the purpose of the general education curriculum is to provide students with intellectual and practical skills and it is valued for supporting students in their role as contributing citizens in a democratic society.

**Research Question 3.** Research Question 3 sought to identify the differences in perceptions between CAS and WCHP faculty-respondents towards the purpose and value of the general education curriculum at the University of New England. Independent t-tests performed on the survey data revealed several significant differences ( $p < .05$ ) between CAS and WCHP faculty-respondents. The most significant differences between the respondents, in terms of the purpose of the general education curriculum, were centered on its traditional liberal arts versus non-traditional foci. WCHP faculty-respondents agreed significantly more with utilitarian-focused purposes, e.g., leadership skills, team building skills, and professionalism, when compared to CAS respondents. When compared to WCHP respondents, CAS faculty-respondents agreed significantly more with a traditional liberal arts-focused purpose; broader view of the world and an understanding of different cultures, in and outside of America. While

respondents from both Colleges disagreed that the general education curriculum should only have a liberal arts-focus, the WCHP faculty-respondents disagreed significantly more than their CAS counterparts.

The most significant differences in perceptions between the respondents, in terms of the value of general education curriculum, focused on how general education is valued by certain stakeholders. The CAS faculty-respondents significantly agreed more in their perception that liberal arts is necessary for the success of student when compared to WCHP faculty-respondents. WCHP respondents significantly agreed more in their perception that they would prefer to teach in their specialization area as opposed to courses in the general education curriculum when compared to CAS faculty-respondents. When compared to WCHP faculty-respondents, CAS respondents significantly disagreed more in their perceptions that general education is valued by Admissions at the University of New England and that general education courses are obstacles to the major.

Data analysis revealed that the majority of all faculty-respondents from CAS and WCHP at UNE have the perception that the general education curriculum has value in supporting students in their role as contributing citizens in a democratic society. However, CAS and WCHP faculty-respondents perceive the general education curriculum as serving different purposes, to provide breadth and to emphasize utilitarian skills, respectively.

## **Conclusions**

This study yielded conclusions based upon the findings and in alignment with the theoretical framework and review of the literature. The following conclusions are relevant to the sample of CAS and WCHP undergraduate faculty members from the University of New England in the study.

**Conclusion 1.** Respondents who teach in the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of New England prescribe to a traditional liberal-arts approach to the general education curriculum leading to fulfilling the role of contributing to the greater good of society.

Labaree (1997) suggests that a democratic society will continue to exist if students are able to competently maintain the responsibilities of citizenship. Traditionally, a liberal arts-focused education provides an awareness of various branches of society's culture to enable participation in processes that actually mold society (Guttman, 1987). Classical liberal arts-focused curriculums at American institutions can be traced back to the establishment of Harvard University, College of William and Mary and Yale University; curriculums were designed to prepare students to become well-rounded individuals who can then effectively contribute to society (Rudolph, 1977).

Historically, this emphasis of a liberal arts-focused general education curriculum can be traced back to both Colleges, Westbrook Junior College and St. Francis College, that eventually merged to become the University of New England. At its establishment in 1931, the Westbrook Junior College for Girls offered a "General Curriculum" through the use of liberal arts-based electives so students could explore a variety of fields before choosing their professional-based specialization. This was offered with the goal of preparing the student for good citizenship within society. St. Francis College, upon its establishment in 1961, set goals to educate the students to become a responsible and compassionate individual through establishing intellectual skills through broad content.

Currently, faculty-respondents from the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of New England appeared to be in alignment with the traditional liberal-arts focused premise as

they emphasized the value of a general education curriculum which provides a broadened exploration of the world to assure that students learn their place in as a citizen within a society. Though limited, similar studies at like-institutions were conducted, i.e. both, liberal arts-based majors and professional studies. In a study conducted by Sellers (1989) at the University of Alabama, the faculty-respondents in the liberal arts reported that defining the purpose of general education through the choice of breadth or depth was too limited. Alternatively, they perceived a need for students to broaden the design their own general education curriculum based on their interests and future goals. The results from Sears' study (1994) was similar to the current one, whereas the faculty representing Colorado State University's College of Liberal Arts perceived that the general education curriculum should be focused on general knowledge in various fields versus in-depth study. In a recent study, Mincer (2011), through a mixed-methods approach, found that the majority of faculty members representing the College of Liberal Arts at Armstrong State University reported that a liberal arts-focused general education curriculum should provide a broad view of the world so to improve every citizen's quality of life.

**Conclusion 2.** Respondents who teach in the Westbrook College of Health Professions at the University of New England prescribe to a skills-based, utilitarian approach to the general education curriculum leading to fulfilling the role of contributing to the greater good of society.

Labaree (1997) suggests that students need to be prepared for a "hierarchal social structure" (p. 46) and the culture within a workplace; social efficiency. Education for social efficiency is designed to prepare a productive workforce, through a practical skills-based focus, so to contribute to the economic means of society, i.e. for public good. The goals of the general education curriculum therefore, shift from traditional liberal learning towards goals that are



dependent upon the shifting marketplace and the needs of the employer. This viewpoint was perhaps first presented by philosopher John Locke in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century when he introduced useful education to contribute to a future profession (Stone, 1998).

Historically, evidence of a useful education for social efficiency purposes can be traced back to the developing Westbrook Junior College for Girls. Shifting from the liberal arts-focused Westbrook Seminary, the junior college was dominated by professional studies, to prepare students to enter the workforce directly upon graduation. At this time a “General Curriculum” was offered to provide liberal arts-based electives so students could explore a variety of fields before choosing their professional-based specialization. However, by 1940, many of the pre-professional programs offered foundational courses through general education requirements. As a result, the flexibility to choose liberal arts-based electives became limited as students chose courses to fulfill prerequisites needed for their professional studies. At this time, the only common courses amongst all students were English Composition and Physical Education. At its evolution into a four-year liberal arts college (1961), St. Francis was very focused on the development of citizenry through breadth, however, due to its offering of several pre-professional programs, also established the importance of depth.

Currently, faculty-respondents from the Westbrook College of Health Professions at the University of New England appeared to be in alignment with the skills-based, utilitarian-focused premise as they emphasized the value of a general education curriculum which provides a competency-based focused general education so to contribute to society through workplace and economic success. Though limited, similar studies at like-institutions were conducted, i.e. consisting of both liberal arts-based majors and professional studies. In 1959, the Institute of Higher Education at Columbia University conducted several faculty-based studies to investigate

their perceptions of general education. When these studies were completed, certain patterns emerged, the most related being that faculty teaching in a professional program favored liberal arts courses which would most contribute to their own professional field. In a study conducted by Sellers (1989) at the University of Alabama, the faculty-respondents in the liberal arts reported that defining the purpose of general education through the choice of breadth or depth was too limited. Alternatively, they perceived a need for students to design their own general education curriculum based on their interests and future goals. Of importance, at the time of Sellers' study, the requirements for general education within the College of Arts and Sciences comprised 25% of the undergraduate curriculum, whereas in the School of Engineering, only 10% of curriculum requirements were derived from general education. Those in a professional education program, therefore, have little flexibility with liberal arts-focused coursework. In 1987, Dumholdt's research investigated an undergraduate physical therapy program within a liberal arts-focused institution. Physical therapy faculty members valued a liberal arts education, however, they also believed that integration between liberal learning and their professional program was critical for the success of the student, as a citizen and in the workforce.

**Conclusion 3.** Respondents from both the College of Arts and Sciences and the Westbrook College of Health Professions at the University of New England perceive that the general education curriculum serves the public good, though CAS adheres to knowledge that contributes to democratic equality, and WCHP adheres to knowledge that contributes to social efficiency.

Mendez (2006) suggests that there is often ambiguity when institutions' faculty discuss the purpose of the general education curriculum. Of the three educational goals offered by Labaree's work, those being: public good through democratic equality, public good through

social efficiency, and private good through social mobility, faculty often question which goal is best to pursue. The decision is often grounded within the context of the culture at the institution (Johnson, 2002). However, due to continual changes in societal needs and therefore the institution's culture, the defined purposes of the general education curriculum intermittently shift from a traditional liberal arts-focus to a specialization-focus, and vice versa. These continual shifts have taken place throughout the history of general education, across institutions, and at the University of New England.

The current study, as with many others that preceded it (Sellers, 1989; Sears, 1994; Mendez, 2006; Dumholdt, 1987; Mincer, 2011; and Albano, 2007), revealed that faculty-respondents from CAS and WCHP find value in the general education curriculum as it supports students' role as a contributing citizen in society; public good. However, the overall purposes of the general education curriculum are distinct between the Colleges. CAS respondents perceived their students' pathway to public good is democratic equality, whereas WCHP perceived their students' contribution to society through social efficiency. This concurrent, yet opposing viewpoint is common and this often non-intentional attempt to cross-purpose may hinder the overall value of general education (Labaree, 1997). This speaks to the concept of intersectional invisibility (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008) which suggests that cross-purposes can reduce one purpose or value and render it invisible. Therefore finding cohesiveness amongst the faculty members' perceptions is critical to creating the most effective and valued general education program (Mincer, 2011; Staley & Trinkle, 2011; AAC&U, 2007; and Morrel & Zimmerman, 2008). Interestingly, only the WCHP respondents perceived importance in providing an interdisciplinary perspective and strong integration with the major within the general education curriculum.

Throughout the history of general education there has been a continuous shift between an emphasis on traditional liberal arts-focused education and specialization. Even in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Newman cautioned against being too focused on one pursuit as it may limit one's contribution to society (Discourses VII, 10, p. 134). Many institutions housing both a college of liberal arts and a college of health professions, like the University of New England, find themselves in struggle to find cohesion between both areas of emphasis. In the current research, respondents interviewed from both CAS and WCHPE suggested that the greatest challenge to value of general education was the lack of connectivity with the major area; "Trying to make a link [with major] is important. This may help define general education goals on a level that will help students understand its value" (CASGE6); and "They [general education courses] could plant the seeds, and the major could refer back to those classes--it takes more collaboration" (WCHP4). Collaboration may lend to the intersection of the historically shifting areas of emphasis that typically lead to cross-purposed and therefore devalued general education (Dill, McLaughlin, & Nieves, 2006). The AAC&U's Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) campaign supports this intersection and integration through its stating that all students should be knowledgeable in areas of human cultures and the physical and natural world, intellectual and practical skills, and be able to demonstrate personal and social responsibility, while supporting integrative and applied learning opportunities (AAC&U, 2007). In this sense, common threads between liberal and professional education and/or democratic equality and social efficiency, respectively, can merge for public good by bridging the strengths and weaknesses of both; liberal education/democratic equality often ignores the practical engagement of these related outcomes, while practical skills cannot occur without informed judgment based on broadened views and multiple perspectives (Sullivan & Rosin, 2008). Labaree (1997)

suggests that the production of informed citizens and strong workers is necessary to maintain a formidable society. Therefore cohesiveness within the general education curriculum that reflects the ever-changing constructs of society may meet the purpose of providing a well-rounded education while enhancing its overall value of contributing to society.

### **Research Recommendations**

Recommendations have been developed based on the findings and conclusions of this study:

1. This study should be replicated using a larger sample size, for both the quantitative and qualitative strands.
2. This study should be replicated at other like-institutions. This will allow researchers to perhaps generalize understandings of some aspects of the relationship between the College of Arts and Sciences and the College of Health Professions at similar institutions.
3. This study should be replicated with a varied mixed-methods approach where the responses to the survey are utilized to inform the qualitative strand. This will allow for a more thorough and coordinated investigation of the faculty perceptions.
4. Because there are continuous cultural shifts in society, there should be continuous assessments of general education programs to assure that it is providing a purpose with the most value for all stakeholders.
5. Future research should be conducted to investigate UNE students', alumnae, and stakeholder's perceptions towards the purpose and value of general education and how it has informed their contributions to society.
6. Future research should be conducted to investigate faculty members' perceptions of professional education.

7. There should be recognition and dialogue regarding the points of intersectionality of value (citizenship) and purpose (public good) when discussing general education curriculum reform at the University of New England.

The purpose of this research was to describe and compare the perceptions of College of Arts and Sciences and Westbrook College of Health Professions' faculty regarding the purpose and value of the general education curriculum at the University of New England. This study identified how faculty-respondents representing CAS and WCHP defined the purpose and value of the general education curriculum within and between each College. As the goals of higher education continue to shift, and a liberal arts-focused general education is questioned for its relevance, this information will contribute to the body of knowledge focused on understanding the purpose and value of general education. It will also hopefully assist leaders in higher education in providing a clear, cohesive, and well-defined purpose of general education which may enhance its overall value to all stakeholders.

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APPENDIX A:  
FACULTY SURVEY ON GENERAL EDUCATION

Demographics

1. In regard to your undergraduate teaching responsibilities, in which College at UNE do you teach most of your courses?
  - a. College of Arts and Sciences
  - b. Westbrook College of Health Professions
2. What is your current position?
  - a. Full-time
  - b. Part-time
  - c. Adjunct
3. What is your current general academic rank?
  - a. Tenured
  - b. Non-Tenured
4. Approximately how many years have you taught at UNE?
  - a. 0-2 years
  - b. 3-5 years
  - c. 6-10 years
  - d. >11 years
5. On average per year, how many different courses within the required general education curriculum, do you teach? (EXP, SGA, ADV, HT, ...)
  - a. 0
  - b. 1
  - c. 2-3
  - d. 3-4
6. On average per year, how many sections of general education courses do you teach per year?
  - a. 0, I do not teach in GE
  - b. 1
  - c. 2-3 of the same course
  - d. 3-4 of the same course
7. If you do not teach in the general education curriculum, which of the following statements best describes you?
  - a. I teach only within the major and do not want to teach general education courses
  - b. I teach only within the major but would like the opportunity to teach general education courses
  - c. Question does not apply to me



8. If you do teach in the general education curriculum, which of the following statements best describes you?

- a. I teach general education courses and I would like to teach more of them
- b. I teach general education courses but would like to teach less of them
- c. I teach general education courses and am happy doing what I am currently doing
- d. Question does not apply to me

All statements below are possible purposes of general education. Please rank your level of agreement for each statement as if you were being asked to design your own general education curriculum. Please keep in mind that the following statements pertain to potential goals of **general education** and NOT overall goals of higher education altogether (general education + major + minor + co-curricular)

|    | Statement<br><b>A general education curriculum should provide...</b>                | <i>Strongly<br/>Disagree<br/>1</i> | <i>Disagree<br/>2</i> | <i>Neither<br/>agree or<br/>disagree<br/>3</i> | <i>Agree<br/>4</i> | <i>Strongly<br/>Agree<br/>5</i> |
|----|---|------------------------------------|-----------------------|--|--------------------|---------------------------------|
| 9  | a foundation of knowledge that helps students have a broader view of the world      |                                    |                       |  |                    |                                 |
| 10 | a well-rounded education  |                                    |                       |  |                    |                                 |
| 11 | preparation for advanced work in major  |                                    |                       |  |                    |                                 |
| 12 | competency in written communication skills  |                                    |                       |  |                    |                                 |
| 13 | competency in verbal communication skills   |                                    |                       |  |                    |                                 |
| 14 | competency in computer skills   |                                    |                       |  |                    |                                 |
| 15 | an expanded knowledge of American culture and history                               |                                    |                       |  |                    |                                 |
| 16 | an expanded knowledge of cultures and societies outside of America                  |                                    |                       |  |                    |                                 |
| 17 | an understanding of diversity in terms of race, gender, class, and culture          |                                    |                       |  |                    |                                 |
| 18 | an understanding of current contemporary social and civic issues                    |                                    |                       |  |                    |                                 |
| 19 | a sense of values, principles, and ethics   |                                    |                       |  |                    |                                 |
| 20 | competency in mathematical and quantitative reasoning skills                        |                                    |                       |  |                    |                                 |
| 21 | competency in critical thinking and problem-solving skills                          |                                    |                       |  |                    |                                 |
| 22 | competency in personal finance  |                                    |                       |  |                    |                                 |
| 23 | an understanding of personal health   |                                    |                       |  |                    |                                 |
| 24 | an understanding of public health   |                                    |                       |  |                    |                                 |
| 25 | an understanding of environmental sustainability                                    |                                    |                       |  |                    |                                 |
| 26 | an understanding of the self and human behavior                                     |                                    |                       |  |                    |                                 |
| 30 | strong work habits  |                                    |                       |  |                    |                                 |
| 31 | an understanding of the importance of being involved in the community               |                                    |                       |  |                    |                                 |
| 32 | strong time-management skills   |                                    |                       |  |                    |                                 |
| 33 | strong teamwork skills  |                                    |                       |  |                    |                                 |
| 34 | strong leadership skills  |                                    |                       |  |                    |                                 |
| 35 | an understanding of professionalism   |                                    |                       |  |                    |                                 |
| 36 | preparation for the ability to be successful in the workplace                       |                                    |                       |  |                    |                                 |
| 37 | a strong connection and integration with the major discipline                       |                                    |                       |  |                    |                                 |
| 38 | an understanding of issues with an interdisciplinary/inter-professional perspective |                                    |                       |  |                    |                                 |

|    |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|----|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| 39 | the ability to utilize best evidence to inform decisions |  |  |  |  |  |
| 40 | only a liberal arts-focused foundation                   |  |  |  |  |  |
| 41 | a liberal arts-focused foundation plus major preparation |  |  |  |  |  |

If there is a purpose statement(s) that you find very important but is not listed above, please specify this in the space provided below:

For the statements below, please rank the level of agreement for each statement. Please keep in mind that the following statements pertain to **general education** and NOT overall goals of higher education altogether (general education + major + minor + co-curricular).

|    | Statement  | <i>Strongly Disagree</i><br>1 | <i>Disagree</i><br>2 | <i>Neither disagree or agree</i><br>3 | <i>Agree</i> | <i>Strongly Agree</i> |
|----|--|-------------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------|-----------------------|
| 42 | I care about general education   |                               |                      |                                       |              |                       |
| 43 | I believe general education is critical for success of the student as a contributing citizen   |                               |                      |                                       |              |                       |
| 43 | I believe general education is critical for success of the student in the workplace  |                               |                      |                                       |              |                       |
| 44 | I communicate the importance of general education to my students   |                               |                      |                                       |              |                       |
| 45 | I believe most, if not all purposes of general education can be met within the major   |                               |                      |                                       |              |                       |
| 46 | I believe students care about their general education courses  |                               |                      |                                       |              |                       |
| 47 | I believe 40 credits of general education is too little for success of the students  |                               |                      |                                       |              |                       |
| 48 | I believe 40 credits of general education is too many for success of the students  |                               |                      |                                       |              |                       |
| 49 | I believe a liberal arts-focused general education is necessary in higher education  |                               |                      |                                       |              |                       |
| 50 | I prefer to teach course in my specialization area over general education courses  |                               |                      |                                       |              |                       |
| 51 | I believe general education courses are obstacles to the students major work   |                               |                      |                                       |              |                       |
| 52 | I believe UNE values general education as an impactful and effective part of students' education                                       |                               |                      |                                       |              |                       |
| 53 | I believe general education is extremely important   |                               |                      |                                       |              |                       |
| 54 | I believe the liberal arts foundation of general education is essential for students seeking a health professional/professional degree |                               |                      |                                       |              |                       |
| 55 | I believe general education is valued by most students   |                               |                      |                                       |              |                       |
| 56 | I believe general education is valued by most faculty members  |                               |                      |                                       |              |                       |
| 57 | I believe general education is valued by most administrators   |                               |                      |                                       |              |                       |
| 58 | I believe general education is valued by admissions  |                               |                      |                                       |              |                       |

If you do not “strongly agree” that general education is valued by the students, faculty, administrators, and/or admissions, what may enhance its value?

If you have chosen “strongly disagree” for any of the above statements, please explain this level of disagreement below:

## APPENDIX B

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Audio Recording Note # \_\_\_\_\_

Undergraduate College Affiliation

\_\_\_\_\_ CAS (teaching general education courses)

\_\_\_\_\_ CAS (not teaching general education courses)

\_\_\_\_\_ WCHP

Introduction

I want to thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to talk with me today. As you know, I am interested in investigating faculty perceptions of the purpose and value of general education. I am faculty members from both, the College of Arts and Sciences and Westbrook College of Health Professions. My goal is to identify themes surrounding faculty member perceptions to gain an understanding of the culture at the University of New England and to perhaps inform general education reform. I want you to know that I will be recording and transcribing our communication verbatim. The confidentiality of your responses will be maintained in the written report. I expect that our interview will take about 60 minutes and I want to confirm that we can have that time together now before we begin. At this time, I will begin recording our communication. Start recorder.

1. **What is the purpose of general education?**
2. **Is general education necessary, why or why not?**
  - *Why are faculty debating the merits of general education?*
  - *What impact do you think general education has for the students- in what ways is general education useful?*
  - *Do you value general education as an essential part of your students' success- why or why not?*
3. **Can you describe evidence you see that students find general education coursework relevant, useful, and/or applicable within their discipline?**
4. **Does administration and/or faculty spend adequate (or not adequate enough) time and resources on general education?**
5. **Is the NEASC requirement of 40 credits general education courses reasonable and appropriate?**

6. What aspects of the students' overall curriculum would you first reduce? (*electives, general education, major requirements, etc*)
7. How do you communicate the value and purpose of general education to your students and colleagues?
  - *In your opinion, what may increase the value of general education?*
  - *What are the characteristics of general education that render it valuable, important, or relevant?*

Conclusion:

Thank you for participating in this interview. Your answers will be transcribed verbatim along with the other interviews I am conducting. Themes will be identified and each interviewee's confidentiality will be maintained in the summary of my findings. If you are interested in receiving a report on my findings, I would be happy to share one. Again, thank you for your time.

## APPENDIX C

## UNDERGRADUATE MAJORS AT UNE

| College of Arts and Sciences   | Westbrook College of Health Professions  |
|--|--|
| Animal Behavior<br>Applied Mathematics<br>Applied Social and Cultural Studies<br>Aquaculture and Aquarium Sciences<br>Arts and Design Media<br>Art Education<br>Biochemistry<br>Biological Sciences<br>Business Administration<br>Chemistry<br>Communications<br>Elementary Education<br>English<br>Environmental Science<br>Environmental Studies<br>History<br>Laboratory Science<br>Liberal Studies<br>Marine Entrepreneurship<br>Marine Sciences (Marine Biology/Oceanography Tracks)<br>Medical Biology (Medical Sciences)<br>Medical Biology (Pre-Physician Assistant Track)<br>Neuroscience<br>Ocean Studies and Marine Affairs<br>Political Science<br>Pre-Pharmacy<br>Psychology<br>Secondary Education<br>Sociology<br>Sport and Recreation Management | Applied Exercise Science<br>Athletic Training<br>Dental Hygiene<br>Health, Wellness and Occupational Studies<br>Nursing<br>Nutrition<br>Public Health<br>Social Work |

## APPENDIX D

### NEASC REQUIREMENTS

#### **NEASC Requirements for General Education:**

- 4.16 The general education requirement is coherent and substantive. It embodies the institution's definition of an educated person and prepares students for the world in which they will live. The requirement informs the design of all general education courses, and provides criteria for its evaluation, including the assessment of what students learn.
- 4.17 The general education requirement in each undergraduate program ensures adequate breadth for all degree-seeking students by showing a balanced regard for what are traditionally referred to as the arts and humanities, the sciences including mathematics, and the social sciences. General education requirements include offerings that focus on the subject matter and methodologies of these three primary domains of knowledge as well as on their relationships to one another.
- 4.18 The institution ensures that all undergraduate students complete at least the equivalent of forty semester hours in a bachelor's degree program, or the equivalent of twenty semester hours in an associate's degree program in general education.
- 4.19 Graduates successfully completing an undergraduate program demonstrate competence in written and oral communication in English; the ability for scientific and quantitative reasoning, for critical analysis and logical thinking; and the capability for continuing learning, including the skills of information literacy. They also demonstrate knowledge and understanding of scientific, historical, and social phenomena, and a knowledge and appreciation of the aesthetic and ethical dimensions of humankind.

New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC): Commission on Institutions of Higher Education (CIHE) (2011). *Standards for Accreditation* (Standard 4, p. 8-9). Retrieved from <https://cihe.neasc.org/standards-policies/standards-accreditation>

## APPENDIX E

### INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE

Dear Faculty Member:

I am writing to request your assistance in a dissertation study focused on undergraduate faculty members' perceptions of the purpose and value of general education. The study aims to enhance the understanding of the culture at the University of New England. Its results may also help inform general education revision.

To conduct this study, I am inviting faculty members from both, the College of Arts and Sciences and the Westbrook College of Health Professions to participate in a web-based survey. The survey will include Likert-type and open-ended questions that inquire about your perceptions of the purpose and value of general education. The survey will require approximately 20 minutes. Faculty members will also be invited to be interviewed at a convenient time and location. The interview will be semi-structured and one on one with me, the Principal Investigator. The interviews will take place at a time and location of your convenience and will require approximately 60 minutes. Participating in the survey does not obligate you to participation in the interview, though it would be greatly appreciated. Throughout the study, all responses will be kept confidential.

If you would like to participate, please respond to this email by \_\_\_\_\_(date). Please also indicate if you would like to participate in only the survey or both, the survey and the interview. I will then send you an informed consent form for you to read, sign and return. You will then be provided with a link to the survey. If you have chosen to volunteer for the interview, I will contact you to set up a convenient place and time.

Check one that applies:

Survey only \_\_\_\_\_ Survey and Interview \_\_\_\_\_

If you should have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at [srahman@une.edu](mailto:srahman@une.edu) or 207-650-0540.

Thank you for taking the time to read through this email. Your participation in this study will be greatly appreciated. Your participation will not only allow me to complete my dissertation but it will also enhance the understanding of how faculty members perceive the purpose and value of general education.

I look forward to your email response.

Sincerely,

Shireen Rahman

Doctoral Student

Educational Leadership

University of New England

srahman@une.edu



## APPENDIX F

### INFORMED CONSENT

#### University of New England

#### CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

**Project Title:**

Faculty perceptions of the purpose and value of the undergraduate general education curriculum: A comparison between the College of Arts and Sciences and the Westbrook College of Health Professions at the University of New England

**Principal Investigator(s):**

Shireen Rahman, Educational Leadership Doctoral Student, College of Graduate and Professional Studies, University of New England; [srahman@une.edu](mailto:srahman@une.edu), 207-650-0540

**Faculty Adviser:**

Michelle Collay, PhD, Professor, College of Graduate and Professional Studies, University of New England; [mcollay@une.edu](mailto:mcollay@une.edu), 207-602-2010

Kathleen Davis, PhD, Associate Lecturer, College of Graduate and Professional Studies, University of New England; [kdavis11@une.edu](mailto:kdavis11@une.edu), 207-602-2844

**Introduction:**

This study will look at how faculty members define the purpose of general education and how much they value general education in higher education.

Please read this form. If you choose to volunteer for this study, completion of this form will record your decision. Your participation in this study is voluntary.

If you have questions about this project before you volunteer or if you have a research-related problem, you may contact the Principal Investigator, Shireen Rahman.

**Why is this study being done?**

This is a research study. This study will look at undergraduate faculty members' thoughts about the purpose and value of general education. The results of this study will show the views on general education in a health professional focused-university which is grounded in the liberal arts and therefore help with general education curriculum improvement.

**Who will be in this study?**

You may volunteer for this study if you are an undergraduate faculty member who teaches in the College of Arts and Sciences or the Westbrook College of Health Professions at the University of New England.

Approximately 100 undergraduate faculty members will be asked to participate in the web-based survey. Approximately 12 (of the 100) undergraduate faculty members will be randomly selected to also participate in an interview with the Principal Investigator; 4 from College of Arts and Sciences who teach general education courses, 4 from College of Arts and Sciences who do not teach general education courses, and 4 from the Westbrook College of Health Professions.

### **What will I be asked to do?**

The researcher will send you an email with a link to a survey. You will be asked to complete the survey one time. The survey will ask you about your opinions about the purpose and value of general education. The survey will include multiple choice questions and questions that you will be asked to answer with your own words. You may refuse to answer any question on this survey. This survey will take you approximately 20 minutes to complete.

If you volunteered for the interview and are randomly selected to participate in the interview, the Principal Investigator will contact you by emailing or calling you to arrange a meeting time and place that is convenient for you. The interviews will last approximately 60 minutes. During the interview the Principal Investigator will ask you questions about your opinions on the purpose and value of general education. These interviews will be recorded for the Investigator's review on a password protected iPad. The Principal Investigator will send you a copy of the transcription and the interpretation of this communication to confirm that your answers are captured correctly. You may refuse to answer any question during this interview process.

Volunteering to complete the one time online survey does not mean you have to volunteer for the interview to participate in this study.

### **What are the possible risks of taking part in this study?**

There is no reasonably foreseeable risk associated with volunteering for this study.

### **What are the possible benefits of taking part in this study?**

You may not directly benefit from this research; however, your participation in the study may help understand the general education curriculum and shed light on possible areas of improvement of the curriculum.

### **What will it cost me?**

There is no cost to you for volunteering for this study.

### **How will my privacy be protected/ Confidentiality of data**

The survey is designed to be anonymous and no one, including the Principal Investigator will be able to link your responses to you. You will be asked to not include any information anywhere on the survey that may individually identify you or anyone else. REDCap (Research Electronic Data Capture) web-based survey service will be used. Data from the survey will be exported to the Principal Investigator's password protected personal laptop computer.

The interviews will take place in a private setting of your choice and convenience. Only the Principal Investigator will interview you. The questions and your answers will be recorded on the Principal Investigator's password protected iPad using a password protected note taking app

(Notability). These audio recordings will be saved using a fake name that cannot be traced back to you. These recordings will be then transcribed and saved on the Principal Investigator's password protected personal laptop computer. The Principal Investigator will use these recordings to develop common themes. The audio recordings will be deleted from the iPad immediately after being transcribed.

Throughout the study, only the Principal Investigator and the faculty adviser will have access to the data. When the study is complete, the Principal Investigator will tabulate results. Results will include no names or personal identifiers. The results of the study will be presented during the Principal Investigator's dissertation defense and posted at DUNE.une.edu.

Please note that the Institutional Review Board may review the research records.

A copy of your signed consent form will be maintained by the Principal Investigator for at least 3 years after the project is complete before it is destroyed. The consent forms will be stored in a secure location that only members of the research team will have access to and will not be affiliated with any data obtained during the project.

You may request the research findings by contacting the Principal Investigator.

### **What are my rights as a research participant?**

Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate, it will not affect your current or future relations with the University of New England. If you volunteer to participate in the survey, this does not mean you have to participate in the interview. If you choose not to participate there is no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits that you are otherwise entitled to receive.

You may skip or refuse to answer any question on the survey or during the interview for any reason. You are also free to withdraw from this research study at any time, for any reason. If you choose to withdraw from the research there will be no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits that you are otherwise entitled to receive.

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects at the University of New England has reviewed the use of human subjects in this research. The IRB is responsible for protecting the rights and welfare of people involved in research.

### **What other options do I have?**

You may choose not to be a part of this study.

### **Whom may I contact with questions?**

The researcher conducting this study is Principal Investigator, Shireen Rahman. For questions or more information concerning this research you may contact her at 207-650-0540 and/or [Srahman@une.edu](mailto:Srahman@une.edu).

You may also contact Faculty Advisors:  
Michelle Collay, PhD, 207-602-2010 and/or [mcollay@une.edu](mailto:mcollay@une.edu)

Kathleen Davis, PhD, 207-602-2844 and/or [kdavis11@une.edu](mailto:kdavis11@une.edu).

If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, you may call Olgun Guvench, M.D. Ph.D., Chair of the UNE Institutional Review Board at (207) 221-4171 or [irb@une.edu](mailto:irb@une.edu).

**Will I receive a copy of this consent form?**

You will be given a copy of this consent form through interoffice mail.

**Participant's Statement**

**I understand the above description of this research and the risks and benefits associated with my participation as a research subject. I agree to take part in the research and do so voluntarily.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's signature or  
Legally authorized representative

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed name

**Researcher's Statement**

**The participant named above had sufficient time to consider the information, had an opportunity to ask questions, and voluntarily agreed to be in this study.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher's signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed name

APPENDIX G  
PARTICIPANT REMINDER EMAIL

Dear \_\_\_\_\_ (*name of participant*)

Thank you for volunteering to participate in my doctoral research. I have sent you the informed consent form through interoffice mail. This email serves as a kind reminder to please read, sign, and send this form back to me through interoffice mail by \_\_\_\_\_ (*date*). Once I receive the signed informed consent, I will send you the link to the survey. If you have also volunteered for the interview, I will also contact you to set up a convenient date, time, and location.

If you should have any questions about the informed consent, please contact me at [srahman@une.edu](mailto:srahman@une.edu) or 207-650-0540.

You may send your informed consent form to:

Shireen Rahman  
Office 231  
Harold Alfond Forum

Again, I appreciate your participation in this research study.

Sincerely,

Shireen Rahman  
Doctoral Student  
Educational Leadership  
University of New England